

The Pope's message at his General Audience of 6 May 2020 as he begins a new series of catechesis on the theme of prayer and invites the faithful never to suffocate that cry for hope and salvation (from the translator in English).

“Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning.

Today we begin a new cycle of Catechist. It's on the theme of “Prayer”. Prayer is the breath of Faith. It is Faith's most proper expression. It is like a groan that comes forth from the heart of the believer and is entrusted to God.

Let us think of the story of Bartimaeus – a character from the Gospel. And, I confess something, of all of them, he is the most friendly. He was blind, and was sitting begging on the side of the road on the outskirts of his city, Jericho. He is not an anonymous character, he has a face, a name, Bartimaeus, which means son of Timaeus. One day he hears that Jesus would be passing that way. In fact, Jericho was a cross-roads for people, pilgrims and merchants continuously pass through it. So Bartimaeus was on the look-out. He would have done everything possible to meet Jesus. So many other people did the same thing. We remember Zacchaeus who climbed a tree. Many wanted to see Jesus, even him.

Thus, this man enters the Gospel as a voice screaming at the top of his lungs. He does not see. He does not know if Jesus is near or far. But he understands that. He hears it because of the crowd, which at a certain point, grew larger and drew nearer. But he is all alone, and no one bothers about him. So what does Bartimaeus do? He screams. He screams and he continues screaming. He uses the only weapon at his disposal – his voice. He begins to cry out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And thus he continued crying out. His repeated outcry is annoying. He doesn't have good manners. And many tried to

reproach him, telling him to be quiet – this isn't good manners, don't do that. But Bartimaeus does not keep silent. Instead he screams even louder: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

This is the hard-headedness of those who are seeking a grace and knocks and knocks and knocks at God's door. That expression "Son of David" is very important – it means the Messiah. It's a profession – he professes the Messiah – it's a profession of faith that flows from the mouth of this man despised by everyone. And Jesus hears his cry. Bartimaeus' prayer touches His heart – God's heart. And the gates of Salvation are opened for him. Jesus has him called. He jumps to his feet. And those who previously had told him to be quiet are now leading him to the Master. Jesus speaks to him. Asks him to express what he desires. This is important. Then, his outcry becomes a request: "That I might see again, Lord." Jesus tells him: "Go, your faith has saved you." He recognises in this poor, helpless, despised man the power of his faith in its entirety which attracts God's mercy and power.

Faith is like having two raised hands, a voice that cries out to implore the gift of Salvation. The Catechism affirms that humility is the foundation of Prayer. Prayer finds its origin in the earth, from the *humus*, from which the word "humble", "humility", derives. It comes from our precarious state, from our continual thirst for God. Faith, we've seen it in Bartimaeus, is a cry. Disbelief suffocates that cry – that's what the people had who were trying to make him be quiet – those were not people of faith. Bartimaeus instead was. Suffocating that cry is a type of *omertà*, (a code of silence). Faith is a protest, against a painful condition for which we do not understand the reason. To disbelief is to limit oneself – to endure a situation that we have adapted ourselves to. Faith is the hope of being saved. Disbelief is to become accustomed to the evil that opposes us. And so it goes on like that.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us begin this series of catecheses with Bartimaeus' outcry, so that, perhaps in a figure such as this, everything is already written. Bartimaeus is a persevering man. Surrounding him were people who were explaining to him that crying out was useless, that it would be a cry unanswered, that it was noisy and disturbing, nothing more. Please stop crying out. Please stop yelling. But he did not remain silent, and in the end, he obtained what he desired.

There is a voice in the depths of mankind that prays which is stronger than any argument to the contrary. Each of us has that voice inside, and it's a voice that flows forth spontaneously without anyone commanding it. It is a voice that questions the meaning of our journey here below. Above all, when we find ourselves in darkness: "Jesus, have mercy on me! Jesus, have mercy on me!" This is a beautiful prayer. But perhaps these words, are they not inscribed on all of creation? Everything prays and begs, so that the mystery of Mercy might find its ultimate fulfilment. It is not only Christians who pray. They share this cry of prayer, but every single man and woman. But the horizon can still be broadened. Paul affirms that all of creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth. It is artists who often interpret this silent groan of creation which weighs on every creature, and is expressed above all in the heart of men and women -for Man is a beggar before God. It's a beautiful definition of Man that's from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: beggars before God.

Thank you. "