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Benedict XVI: Prayer Reveals Need For God

MAY 12TH 2011 BY NEWS

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VATICAN CITY, - Benedict XVI is urging people to spend more time in prayer, which he called an expression of man's profound need for meaning and understanding.

"Dear brothers and sisters," the Pope appealed at the end of today's general audience, "let us learn to spend more time before God. Let us learn to recognize in silence the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, to recognize in the depth of ourselves his voice that calls us and leads us back to the profundity of our existence, to the fount of life, to the source of salvation, to make us go beyond the limits of our life and to open ourselves to the measure of God, to the relationship with Him who is Infinite Love."

Benedict explained to those gathered in St. Peter's Square that "man is religious by nature: he is as 'homo religiosus' as he is 'homo sapiens' and 'homo faber.'"

He noted that man has an innate need to "find a light to give an answer to the questions that have to do with the profound meaning of reality; an answer that he cannot find in himself, in progress, in empirical science."

Benedict XVI explained that "homo religiosus" is not confined to the earlier eras of history, but that man in every age -- from cavemen to the Digital age -- seeks "in religious experience the ways to overcome his finitude and to ensure his precarious earthly adventure."

Thirst for the infinite

"Man bears within himself a thirst for the infinite," he continued, "a nostalgia for eternity, a search for beauty, a desire for love, a need for light and truth, which drive him toward the Absolute; man bears within himself the desire for God. And man knows, in some way, that he can address himself to God, that he can pray to him."

The Pontiff said that the attraction toward God "is the soul of prayer, which is cloaked in many forms and modalities according to the history, time, moment, grace and finally the sin of each one of those who pray."

He added that prayer is a mindset, and not a "series of practices and formulas." Prayer, he said, is "a way of being before God, rather than carrying out acts of worship or pronouncing words."

"Prayer has its center and finds its roots in the most profound being of the person," the Holy Father continued. "That is why it is not easily decipherable and for the same reason, it can be subject to misunderstandings and mystifications."

"Also in this sense we can understand the expression: it is difficult to pray. In fact, prayer is the place par excellence of gratuitousness, of the tension toward the Invisible, the Unexpected, the Ineffable. "Because of this, the experience of prayer is a challenge for everyone, a 'grace' to be invoked, a gift of the One whom we address."

On one's knees

Benedict XVI also commented on the dynamic of prayer, which is the result of man being "a creature in need of help, incapable of achieving by himself the fulfillment of his existence and his hope." Given this creature-Creator relationship, the Pope said that consequently, prayer "has one of its typical expressions in the gesture of kneeling."

"It is a gesture that bears in itself a radical ambivalence: in fact, I can be obliged to kneel -- condition of indigence and slavery -- or I can kneel spontaneously, confessing my limit and, hence, my need for the Other," the Pontiff explained. "To Him I confess that I am weak, needy, a 'sinner.'"

"In the experience of prayer," the Holy Father said, "the human creature expresses all his awareness of himself, all that he is able to understand of his existence and, at the same time, he addresses himself wholly to the Being before whom he is, he orients his soul to that Mystery from which he awaits the fulfillment of his most profound desires and help"

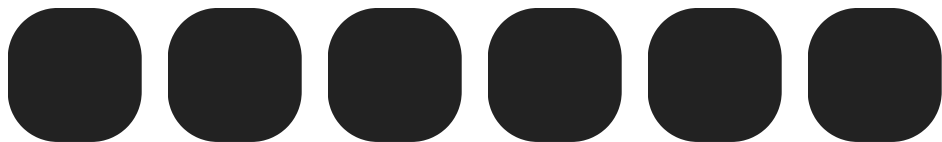
to surmount the indigence of his life. "In this looking at the Other, in this addressing 'the beyond' is the essence of prayer, as experience of a reality that surpasses the sentient and the contingent.

"However, the full realization of man's search is found only in the God who reveals himself. Prayer, which is the opening and raising of the heart to God, becomes a personal relationship with Him. And even if man forgets his Creator, the living and true God does not fail to call man to the mysterious encounter of prayer."

LAST UPDATED ON MAY 12TH 2011 BY NEWS

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