Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis leads his general audience in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican May 13, 2020. The pope greeted Portuguese speakers during the live-streamed audience as he commemorated the 103rd anniversary of the first Marian apparition in Fatima, Portugal. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Prayer is more than just a physical, emotional or intellectual act; it is an inner desire to encounter God, Pope Francis said.

Continuing his new series of talks on prayer during his weekly general audience May 13, the pope said that the longing expressed through prayer "is more than a need, more than a necessity."

"Prayer is an impetus; it is an invocation that goes beyond us — something that is born in the depths of our person and reaches out, because it feels the yearning for an encounter," the pope said.

Greeting Portuguese-speakers during the audience, which was livestreamed from the papal library in the Apostolic Palace, the pope commemorated the 103rd anniversary of the first Marian apparition in Fatima, Portugal.

He called on Catholics to follow Mary's example and live out the month of May by praying the rosary, which was "a desire repeatedly expressed by Our Lady at Fatima."

The pope also commemorated the 39th anniversary of the assassination attempt on St. John Paul II, who was shot at close range while greeting a crowd in St. Peter's Square in 1981.

Two bullets pierced the pope's abdomen, but no major organs were struck; a bullet had missed his heart and aorta by a few inches, prompting the Polish pontiff to say that "it was a mother's hand that guided the bullet's path."

Announcing that he will celebrate a Mass in remembrance of St. John Paul's 100th birthday May 18, Francis exhorted the faithful to "thank God for giving us this holy bishop of Rome, and let us ask him to help us, to help this church of Rome to convert and go forward."

In his main talk, the pope reflected on Christian prayer that is "born from a revelation" and celebrates throughout the year the "manifestation of God, his epiphany."

"God reveals his glory in the poverty of Bethlehem, in the contemplation of the Magi, in baptism at the Jordan, in the miracle of the wedding at Cana," he explained.

A characteristic of Christian prayer is that it is not based on fear or servitude. Instead, Christians can turn to God and "dare to confidently call him 'Father.'"

"Christianity has banished any 'feudal' relationship from the bond with God. In the heritage of our faith, there are no expressions such as 'subjugation,' 'slavery' or 'servitude,'" he said. Instead, there are words such as "covenant," "friendship" and "communion."

Francis encouraged Christians to "enter into the mystery of the covenant" by placing themselves in God's merciful embrace even if they feel "like guests who do not deserve so much honor."

He also called on the faithful "to say to God, in the amazement of prayer: 'Is it possible that you know only love?' This is the passionate nucleus of every Christian prayer."

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