
Pope at audience: No to “practical atheism, that everyday atheism”

“Prayer is the salvation of the human being”, Francis said in the catechesis of today’s general audience, the last one dedicated to the Psalms, cautioning against “false prayer, a prayer said only for the admiration of others”, and against what he termed “practical atheism, that everyday atheism.” “Not to recognize the human person as the image of God is a sacrilege, an abomination, the worst offense that can be directed toward the temple and the altar”, Francis cautioned. “The prayers of the Psalms help us not to fall into the temptation of the ‘wicked’, that is, of living, and perhaps also of praying, as if God does not exist, and as if the poor do not exist”, Francis said. *“False prayer”, is that of those “who go to Mass only to make it seen that they are Catholics or to show off the latest fashion that they acquired, or to make a good impression in society”,* the Holy Father explained. They resemble the figure that in the Psalms is referred to as a “negative figure”, the ungodly, that is, “he or she who lives as if God does not exist. “This is the person without any transcendent referent, whose arrogance has no limits, who fears no judgment regarding what he or she thinks or does. For this reason, the Psalter presents prayer as the fundamental reality of life. The reference to the absolute and to the transcendent – which the spiritual masters call the ‘holy fear of God’ – and which makes us completely human, is the boundary that saves us from ourselves, preventing us from venturing into life in a predatory and voracious manner.” Francis assured:

“When one prays, everything acquires depth”,

“it becomes weighty, as if God takes it in hand and transforms it.” “The worst service someone can give God, and others as well, is to pray tiredly, by rote. To pray like parrots. No, one prays with the heart”, Francis said. “Prayer is the centre of life”, the Pope reiterated: **“if there is prayer, even a brother, a sister, even an enemy becomes important.** Those who adore God, love His children. Those who respect God, respect human beings.”

“Prayer is not a sedative to alleviate life’s anxieties”:

the prayer of the Christian has the breath, the spiritual tension of the Psalms, holding the temple and the world together: “Prayer can begin in the penumbra of a church’s nave, but come to an end on the city streets. And vice versa, it can blossom during the day’s activities and reach its fulfilment in the liturgy” for **“the church doors are not barriers**, but permeable membranes, willing to allow everyone’s groans in”, and the world is always present in the prayer found in the Psalter. In short, “where there is God, the human person must be there as well.” *“If you pray many rosaries each day but then gossip about others, and nourish grudges inside, if you hate others, this is truly artificial, it is not true”,* the Pope cautioned in unprepared remarks to stigmatize practical atheism, everyday atheism: **“If any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar;** for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” “And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.” **“God does not support the atheism of those who repudiate the divine image that is imprinted in every human being”,** the Pope concluded: “That everyday atheism: I believe in God but I keep my distance from others and I allow myself to hate others. This is practical atheism.”

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