

PRAYER

Jesus fought against his weakness by clinging to the prayer to the Father. Jesus' life was in intimate relationship with the Father. Every time he withdrew, alone, to pray from the heights or in the desert, when he rejoined the Apostles he said nothing to them about his conversation with the Father.

And in Gethsemane, too, Jesus withdraws to pray, in the place where he frequently went because it was silent and secluded. His prayer was the most intense that it had ever been. It was the prayer of one condemned to death who pleads not to have to die.

Was Jesus aware of what was about to happen? The Synoptic Gospels recount that after Peter recognized him as the "Messiah of God" (Mark 8:29 and par.), Jesus

foretold that "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Mark 8:31 and par.). Jesus frequently helped his disciples to understand the Scriptures and the words of the Prophets announcing the coming of the Messiah that was to be fulfilled in him through his inglorious end.



After the Eucharistic meal at the Cenacle, and before starting off for Gethsemane, Luke indicates that Jesus spoke of his passion that was part of the plan of salvation, as Isaiah had announced: "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, He was counted among the wicked" (Luke 22:37). According to Matthew and Mark, it was during his journey from the Cenacle to the Mount of Olives that

Jesus indicated to his disciples how they would react to his arrest, as Zechariah had prophesied "This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee" (Matt 26:31-32; Mark 14:27-28).

Jesus knew what was about to occur, and his prayer at Gethsemane sought to bridge the gap between his feeling of rejection for the extreme suffering that would lead to his death, on the one hand, and his desire to learn obedience to the Father, on the other. Hence the substantial prayer of Jesus to his Father, the "Abba": to faithfully yield to his will even though it was indiscernible and difficult to accept. Besides, he himself had on a number of occasions insisted to the Apostles that they must carry out God's will: "For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt 12:50).

Jesus fell prostrate on the ground: a position of prayer that expressed obedience to the will of the Father and abandonment in him with complete trust. In this strange and contradictory destiny of the messiah who has come to save humanity and is compelled to suffer death, he saw the secret of the radical renovation of the condition of man and of the world.

This night of anguish in Gethsemane is also part of God's loving plan for man and the prayer of Jesus is the same one that each person can hold on to in moments of darkness.

As Benedict XVI said, citing the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Jesus brings to completion the loving plan of the Father and takes upon himself all the anguish of humanity and all the petitions and intercessions of the history of salvation. He presents them to the Father who accepts them and answers them beyond all hope by raising his Son from the dead" (General Audience, 1 February 2012).