



VATICAN CITY — On Wednesday, Pope Francis called out the common habit of chatting with people before Mass, stressing that this is a time for silent prayer, when we prepare our hearts for an encounter with the Lord.

“When we go to Mass, maybe we arrive five minutes before, and we start to chitchat with those in front of us,” the Pope said Nov. 15. However, “it is not a moment for chitchat.”

“It is a moment of silence for preparing ourselves for dialogue, a time for the heart to collect itself in order to prepare for the encounter with Jesus,” he said, adding that “silence is so important.”

Continuing his new catechesis on the Eucharist, the Pope recalled his message the week prior, that the Mass is not a show, but a place where we encounter the Lord. In this encounter, he said, silence is what “prepares us and accompanies us.”

But to really understand this, first we have to answer a question, he said. And that is: What is prayer?

Prayer is, “first and foremost dialogue, a personal relationship with God,” he said. And in prayer, just like in any dialogue, it needs moments of silence “together with Jesus.” This, he said, is because it is only in the “mysterious silence of God” that his word can resound in our hearts.

Francis explained that prayer is something that Jesus himself taught us to do, first of all by example, when in the Gospels he withdraws to a secluded place to pray. And second, he teaches us again when he tells his disciples that the first word in knowing how to pray is “Father.”

This is “so simple,” the Pope said. “So we have to learn ‘Father.’” Then we must take on the attitude of a small child, one full of trust and confidence, knowing that God “remembers you and takes care of you,” he said.

The second attitude we should take is one of childlike surprise and wonder. The child, he said, “always asks a thousand questions because he wants to discover the world; in our relationship with the Lord, in prayer,” he said, “open the heart to wonder.”

He noted that many say they don’t have time to pray. “We lose sight of what is fundamental: our life of the heart, our spiritual life, our life of prayer with the Lord.”

However, Jesus surprises us in truth by loving us and calling us even in our weaknesses, he said, adding that just as Christ called his disciples, he also calls us to him at each Mass.

“This is, therefore, the greatest grace: to be able to experience the Mass, the Eucharist. It is the privileged moment to be with Jesus, and through him, with God.”