Teach us to pray
(From Conversation with God, Fernandez Carvajal)

Jesus had the habit of praying early in the morning in out-of-the-way places. His disciples would often find the Lord thoroughly absorbed in conversation with his heavenly Father. He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him; 'Lord, teach us to pray.' We ought to make the same request: Jesus, teach me how to deal with you, tell me what I should ask you for. We should do this because we can frequently find ourselves in front of God without knowing what to say to him or how we should speak to him.

The Lord answered his disciple's request with the perfect prayer, the Our Father. He pronounced every word with care. He taught them how to put all their trust in prayer to their Father God. Whenever we talk to God we are most probably asking him for something. This is because we are children of God, children in need. For his part, God wants only to spend himself on us. "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?"

The Lord solemnly promises to be attentive to our requests: "For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Jesus cannot be more emphatic. We are simply deluding ourselves if we think that we have no need of God, having grown accustomed to our faults and failures. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. We should go the Tabernacle exactly as the sick and the suffering used to go to Jesus in the New Testament.

"What does praying mean? Prayer means feeling one's own insufficiency through the various necessities which man has to face, necessities that are part of his life. Such as, for example, the need for bread to which Christ refers in the example of that man who wakes up his friend at midnight to ask him for bread. Similar necessities are numerous. The need for bread is, in a way, a symbol of all material necessities, the necessities of the human body, the necessities of this existence which springs from the fact that man is a body. But the range of these necessities is wider." (John Paul II)

Humility is a prerequisite to confident conversation with God. We need to realise our limitations before we can appreciate how much we depend on our Father God. To learn to pray means to learn the 'Father'. If we learn the 'Father' reality in the full sense of the word, in its full dimension, we have learned everything. To learn who the Father is means learning what absolute trust is. To learn the Father means acquiring the certainty that he absolutely cannot refuse anything. This is all said in today's Gospel. He does not refuse you even when everything materially and psychologically, seems to indicate refusal. He never refuses you. He will never abandon us. In our conversation with God we have to keep in mind our divine filiation and our human limitations.