



Living the Gospel



Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time — July 25, 2010

Theme: "You have received a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry, Abba, Father."

Gathering Prayer

All: God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value. Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1-13

¹ Now it happened that he was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' ² He said to them, 'When you pray, this is what to say: Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come ³ give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, ⁴ for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test.' ⁵ He also said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves, ⁵ He also said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him;" ⁷ and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you." ⁸ I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake, persistence will make him get up and give his friend all he wants. ⁹ 'So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who

knocks will have the door opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asked for a fish, would hand him a snake? ¹² Or if he asked for an egg, hand him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Gospel Notes

1-4. St Luke gives us a shorter form of the Lord's Prayer, or Our Father, than St Matthew (6:9-13). In Matthew there are seven petitions, in Luke only four. Moreover, St Matthew's version is given in the context of the Sermon on the Mount and specifically as part of Jesus' teaching on how to pray; St Luke's is set in one of those occasions just after our Lord has been at prayer-two different context. There is nothing surprising about our Lord teaching the same thing on different occasions, not always using exactly the same words, not always at the same length, but always stressing the same basic points. Naturally, the Church uses the longer form of the Lord's Prayer, that of St Matthew.

"When the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, 'Teach us to pray', he replied by saying the words of the 'Our Father', thereby giving us a concrete model which is also a universal model. In fact, everything that can and must be said to the Father is contained in those seven requests which we all know by heart. There is such a simplicity in them that even a child can learn them, but at the same time such a depth that a whole life can be spent meditating on their meaning. Isn't that so? Does not each of those petitions deal with something essential to our life, directing it totally towards God the Father? Doesn't this prayer speak to us about 'our daily bread', 'forgiveness of sins, since we forgive others' and about protecting us from 'temptation' and 'delivering us from evil'?" (John Paul II, *General Audience*, 14 March 1979)

The first thing our Lord teaches us to ask for is the glorification of God and the coming of the Kingdom. That is what is really important-the Kingdom of God and his justice (cf. Mt 6:33). Our Lord also wants us to pray confident that our Father will look after our material needs, for "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (Mt 6:32). However, the Our Father makes us aspire especially to possess the goods of the Holy Spirit, and invites us to seek forgiveness (and to forgive others) and to avoid the danger of sinning. Finally, the Our Father emphasizes the importance of vocal prayer. "*Domine doce nos orare*. Lord, teach us to pray!' And our Lord replied: 'When you pray, say: *Pater noster, qui es in coelis*...Our Father, who art in heaven...'. What importance we must attach to vocal prayer!" (Bl. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 84)

1. Jesus often went away to pray (cf. Lk 6:12; 22:39ff). This practice of the Master's causes his disciples to want to learn how to pray. Jesus

teaches them to do what he himself does. Thus, when our Lord prays, he begins with the Word "Father!": "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46; see also Mt 11:25; 26:42, 53; Lk 23:34; Jn 11:41; etc.). His prayer on the Cross, "My God, my God,..." (Mt 27:46), is not really an exception to this rule, because there he is quoting Psalm 22, the desperate prayer of the persecuted just man.

Therefore, we can say that the first characteristic, prayer should have is the simplicity of a son speaking to his Father. "You write: 'To pray is to talk with God. But what about?' About what? About Him, about yourself: joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions, daily worries, weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petition: and Love and reparation. In a word: to get to know him and to get to know yourself: 'to get acquainted!'" (Bl. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 91).

2. "Hallowed be thy name": in this first petition of the Our Father "we pray that God may be known, loved, honored and served by everyone and by ourselves in particular." This means that we want "unbelievers to come to a knowledge of the true God, heretics to recognize their errors, schismatic to return to the unity of the Church, sinners to be converted and the righteous to persevere in doing good." By this first petition, our Lord is teaching us that "we must desire God's glory more than our interest and advantage." This hallowing of God's name is attained "by prayer and good example and by directing all our thoughts, affections and actions towards him" (*St Pius X Catechism*, 290-293).

"Thy Kingdom come": "By the Kingdom of God we understand a triple spiritual kingdom-the Kingdom of God in us, which is grace; the kingdom of God on earth, which is the Catholic Church; and the Kingdom of God in heaven, which is eternal bliss [...]. As regards grace, we pray that God reign in us with his sanctifying grace, by which he is pleased to dwell in us as a king in his throne-room, and that he keeps us united to him by the virtues of faith, hope and charity, by which he reigns in our intellect, in our heart and in our will [...]. As regards the Church, we pray that it extend and spread all over the world for the salvation of men [...]. As regards heavens, we pray that one day we be admitted to that eternal bliss for which we have been created, where we will be totally happy" (*ibid*, 294-297).

3. The Tradition of the Church usually interprets the 'bread' as not only material bread, since "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt4:4; Deut 8:3). Here Jesus wants us to ask God for "what we need each day for soul and body [...]. For our soul we ask God to sustain our spiritual life, that is, we beg him to give us his grace, of which we are continually in need [...]. The life of our soul is sustained mainly by the divine word and by the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar [...]. For our bodies we pray for what is needed to maintain us" (*St Pius X Catechism*, 302-305).

Christian doctrine stresses two ideas in this petition of the Our Father: the first is trust in divine providence, which frees us from excessive desire to

accumulate possessions to insure us against the future (cf. Lk 12: 16-21); the other idea is that we should take a brotherly interest in other people's needs, thereby moderating our selfish tendencies.

4. "So rigorously does God exact from us forgetfulness of injuries and mutual affection and love, that he rejects and despises the gifts and sacrifices of those who are not reconciled to one another" (*St Pius V Catechism*, IV, 14, 16).

"This, sisters, is something which we should consider carefully; it is such a serious and important matter that God should pardon us our sins, which have merited eternal fire, that we must pardon all trifling things which have been done to us. As I have so few, Lord, even of these trifling things, to offer thee, thy pardoning of me must be a free gift: there is abundant scope here for thy mercy. Blessed be thou, who endures one that is poor" (St Teresa of Avila, *Way of Perfection*, chap. 36).

"And lead us not into temptation": it is not a sin to *feel* temptation but to *consent* to temptation. It is also a sin to put oneself voluntarily into a situation which can easily lead one to sin. God allows us to be tempted, in order to test our fidelity, to exercise us in virtue and to increase our merits with the help of grace. In this petition we ask the Lord to give us this grace not to be overcome when put to the test, or to free us from temptation if we cannot cope with it.

5-10. One of the essential features of prayer is trusting perseverance. By this simple example and others like it (cf. Lk 18: 1-7) our Lord encourages us not to desist in asking God to hear us. "Persevere in prayer. Persevere even when your efforts seem barren. Prayer is always fruitful" (Bl. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 101).

9-10. "Do you see the effectiveness of prayer when it is done properly? Are you not convinced like me that, if we do not obtain what we ask God for, it is because we are not praying with faith, with a heart pure enough, with enough confidence, or that we not persevering in prayer the way we should? God has never refused nor will ever refuse anything to those who ask for his graces in the way they should. Prayer is the great recourse available to us to get out of sin, to persevere in grace, to move God's heart and to draw upon us all kinds of blessings from heaven, whether for the soul or to meet our temporal needs" (St John Mary Vianney, *Selected Sermons*, Fifth Sunday after Easter).

11-13. Our Lord uses the example of human parenthood as a comparison to stress again the wonderful fact that God is our Father, for God's fatherhood is the source of parenthood in heaven and on earth (cf. Eph 3:15). "The God of our faith is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men-their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the second person of the most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving Father who now leads us

gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts" (Bl. J. Escriva, *Christ is passing by*, 84).

13. The Holy Spirit is God's best gift to us, the great promise Christ gives his disciples (cf. Jn 5:26), the divine fire which descends on the Apostles at Pentecost, filling them with fortitude and freedom to proclaim Christ's message (cf. Acts 2). "The profound reality which we see in the text of holy Scripture is not a remembrance from the past, from some golden age of the Church which has since been buried in history. Despite the weaknesses and the sins of every one of us, it is the reality of today's Church and the Church in all times. 'I will pray to the Father,' our Lord told his disciples, 'and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever.' Jesus has kept his promise. He has risen from the dead and, in union with the eternal Father, he sends us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and to give us life" (Bl. J. Escriva, *Christ is passing by*, 128).

Gospel Reflection

Little children can be amazingly persistent about some things. If they want a new toy, they ask, and ask-often to the point of greatly annoying the parents. They might be shown how to stack up building blocks and then sit for hours doing it over and over again. They try over and over again to learn to tie their shoe laces and keep at it until they succeed. Children (and we) learn through persistence. They (and we) achieve through persistence. In fact, persistence is something that can serve us throughout our lives. The important thing to remember, though, is that the point isn't the persistence itself; the point is gaining what is desired. The first reading and gospel this Sunday each speaks of persistence. In both readings what is important is not the persistence but the result: fruitful prayer. The readings focus on where prayer takes us-the trust of prayer is life, which ultimately leads to eternal life.

In this gospel Jesus "teach[es] us to pray." Most importantly, he teaches us to whom we pray: God who is a generous and caring Father. He also teaches us for what we should pray: not just for immediate needs ("daily bread") but, more important, for ultimate needs: the furthering of God's kingdom, the gift of forgiveness, and protection from anything that would take us from God. It is persistence in prayer that brings us deeper into our relationship with God and opens us to receive these "good gifts" God offers us. It is persistence in prayer that establishes and maintains the kind of relationship with God that reassures us of the ultimate goal of life: eternal happiness with our divine Lover.

The two examples that Jesus uses (neighborly friendship and father-son kinship) reveal that what is always granted through prayer is deeper relationship with God and others. Jesus teaches us that the one to whom we pray is our "Father" whose love and care for us is unlimited. This deeply intimate and personal relationship with God inspires in us the confidence ("how much more ...") to pray with "persistence" and the realization that what we pray for is not as important as the fact that we address God in

such intimate terms. The prayer always deepens our relationship with God and this is already an answer to what we need.

Living the Paschal Mystery

There is nothing wrong with praying for specific needs; after all, we do it at every Mass at the prayer of the faithful, not to mention our own personal and daily prayer of petition. This gospel challenges us to go beyond specific needs and get the larger picture, to focus on the gift God offers us always in prayer, and often in surprising and unexpected ways. What inspires confidence in us is not whether God gives us what we specifically ask for in prayer; our confidence comes from the Spirit who dwells within and establishes a most intimate relationship between God and us-shared life.

Unlike small children who seem to have a capacity to stay endlessly with some tasks, most of us need to develop a habit of prayer. With such busy schedules, this can be difficult. Choosing a specific time and being persistent about honoring that time for prayer helps.

New and Old Testament links

First Reading — Genesis 18: 20-32

²⁰ Then Yahweh said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin is so grave, ²¹ that I shall go down and see whether or not their actions are at all as the outcry reaching me would suggest. Then I shall know.' ²² While the men left there and went to Sodom, Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence. ²² While the men left there and went to Sodom, Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence. ²³ Abraham stepped forward and said, 'Will you really destroy the upright with the guilty?' ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty upright people in the city. Will you really destroy it? Will you not spare the place for the sake of the fifty upright in it? ²⁵ Do not think of doing such a thing: to put the upright to death with the guilty, so that upright and guilty fare alike! Is the judge of the whole world not to act justly?' ²⁶ Yahweh replied, 'If I find fifty upright people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place because of them.' ²⁷ Abraham spoke up and said, 'It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord, I who am dust and ashes: ²⁸ Suppose the fifty upright were five short? Would you destroy the whole city because of five?' 'No,' he replied, 'I shall not destroy it if I find forty-five there.' ²⁹ Abraham persisted and said, 'Suppose there are forty to be found there?' 'I shall not do it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the forty.' ³⁰ Abraham said, 'I hope the Lord will not be angry if I go on: Suppose there are only thirty to be found there?' 'I shall not do it,' he replied, 'if I find thirty there.' He said, 'It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord: Suppose there are only twenty there?' 'I shall not destroy it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the twenty.' ³² He said, 'I trust my Lord will not be angry if I speak once more: perhaps there will only be ten.' 'I shall not destroy it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the ten.'

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 138: 1-3, 6-8

¹ [Of David] I thank you, Yahweh, with all my heart, for you have listened to the cry I uttered. In the presence of angels I sing to you, ² I bow down before your holy Temple. I praise your name for your faithful love and your constancy; your promises surpass even your fame. ³ You heard me on the day when I called, and you gave new strength to my heart. ⁶ Sublime as he is, Yahweh looks on the humble, the proud he picks out from afar. ⁷ Though I live surrounded by trouble you give me life -- to my enemies' fury! You stretch out your right hand and save me, ⁸ Yahweh will do all things for me. Yahweh, your faithful love endures for ever, do not abandon what you have made.

Second Reading — Colossians 2: 12-14

¹² You have been buried with him by your baptism; by which, too, you have been raised up with him through your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead. ¹³ You were dead, because you were sinners and uncircumcised in body: he has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us every one of our sins. ¹⁴ He has wiped out the record of our debt to the Law, which stood against us; he has destroyed it by nailing it to the cross.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1969. The New Law *practices the acts of religion*: almsgiving, prayer and fasting, directing them to the "Father who sees in secret," in contrast with the desire to "be seen by men." (Cf. *Mt* 6:1-6; 16-18.) Its prayer is the Our Father. (Cf. *Mt* 6:9-13; *Lk* 11:2-4.)

2613. Three principal parables on prayer are transmitted to us by St. Luke:

- The first, "the importunate friend," (*Lk* 11:5-13) invites us to urgent prayer: "Knock, and it will be opened to you." To the one who prays like this, the heavenly Father will "give whatever he needs," and above all the Holy Spirit who contains all gifts.

- The second, "the importunate widow," (*Lk* 18:1-8) is centered on one of the qualities of prayer: it is necessary to pray always without ceasing and with the patience of faith. "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

- The third parable, "the Pharisee and the tax collector," (*Lk* 18:9-14) concerns the humility of the heart that prays. "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" The Church continues to make this prayer its own: *Kyrie eleison!*

Sharing and Discussion

1. What aspect of the Lord's Prayer is most meaningful to you?
2. What aspect of your prayer life would you most like to have Jesus help you change?
3. Describe how you think God is viewing you, and your requests, when you pray?

Closing Prayer

All: God of abundance, you give us all good things in order that your kingdom may be firmly established: hear these prayers that one day we might share in your everlasting kingdom of heaven. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

Saturday 10am - 12pm at Church of The Holy Cross (room #03-06)

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