

July 28, 2019
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “when you pray, say:

Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,
and do not subject us to the final test.”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him.’ And he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything. “I tell you, if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

“And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

Background:

The gospel for last week portrayed Mary as a good disciple, sitting at the feet of her master. This is despite Martha’s concern that Mary has left her alone to do the typical tasks assigned to women in extending hospitality. Instead of responding sympathetically to Martha, Jesus supports Mary’s decision to take the role of disciple. In Luke’s gospel, the text for this week’s gospel follows immediately after that text.

Luke often describes Jesus as a person of prayer.

- Luke 3:21 Jesus prays after his baptism
- Luke 6:12 Jesus prays before sending out the twelve
- Luke 9:18 Jesus prays before asking his disciples who people think he is
- Luke 9:29 Jesus prays on the mountain at the Transfiguration
- Luke 11:1 (today’s text)
- Luke 22:39-46 Jesus prays before his arrest, trial, beating, and death

In prayer, Jesus finds strength and the guidance he needs to face those especially challenging points in his life. In today’s text, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray as John has taught his disciples. At least in part they are asking for a prayer form that will identify them as disciples of Jesus and have influence with God as Jesus himself seems to have influence.

It was common for a religious leader to teach his disciples to pray. The text indicates that seeing Jesus at prayer prompted the disciples’ request that he teach them to pray. There is some discussion among biblical scholars whether what Jesus taught was an actual prayer, or a formula to be used in their prayer. Tradition indicates that it has been understood as a prayer; but to see it as a formula for praying could also be part of what Jesus intended.

The prayer itself has an unmistakable communal aspect; all the pronouns are plural. It has three movements: invoking God, glorifying God, and finally petitioning God.

The term “Father” suggests a relationship that is both intimate and childlike. Use of the prayer invites us into relationship with God through Jesus. The prayer asks that God be given the honor that is due, and for the coming reign of God, the end time when the fullness of God’s plan will be manifest. The prayer for daily bread assumes continuous giving by God and a constant dependence on God. The petition that God be forgiving carries with it the understanding that those asking are themselves forgiving of others. Lastly, the prayer asks that we not be overwhelmed by temptation.

Following the instruction of the prayer itself, Jesus uses a parable to instruct the disciples that they should be persistent in their prayer. In the parable, the friend responds because of his neighbor’s persistence, not because it was the right thing to do or because he will face public embarrassment if he does not. Finally, Jesus teaches his disciples that God knows how to give good things to those who ask, but they must ask.

Most people to whom Jesus preached were very aware of how little control they had over their own lives. Governments, religious institutions, and the few wealthy of the day made most decisions for the people. Developments in science and medicine, the industrial revolution, and emphasis on the self are factors that have made dramatic changes – changes in our self-perception and in our perceived need for intervention by others and by a higher power. The context in which we strive to be people of prayer is very different than that of Jesus’ disciples.

Reflection Questions:

1. I pray mostly...
2. If I reflect on how I pray today, those who have influenced my prayer would include...
3. The times I most felt like I needed someone to teach me to pray were...
4. The Our Father is meaningful to me because...
5. Why do you think the Our Father is part of every Mass, and often used as part of public prayer services?
6. When I look at my own prayer through the lens of the Our Father, I find...
7. In verse 11 Jesus asks the disciples, “What father among you...?” How does your experience of being a father, or of the men who have been “fathers” to you, shape your prayer to God as Father?
8. If you are able, take some time to talk to God as Father, or Dad or even Daddy. Try to be able to be aware of your own feelings as you talk to God in this way.

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for July 18, 2019, the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord said: "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go see whether their actions fully correspond to the cry against them. I mean to find out."

Abraham said: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe it out, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people?"

Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?" The Lord replied, "If I find fifty innocent people

in the city, I will spare it." Abraham said: "What if there are five less than fifty innocent people? He answered, "I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there." But Abraham persisted, saying "What if only forty are found there?" He replied, "I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty." Then Abraham said, "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?" He replied, "I will forbear doing it if I can find but thirty there." Still Abraham went on, "Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?" The Lord answered, "I will not destroy it, for the sake of the twenty." But he still persisted: "Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time. What if there are at least ten there?" He replied, "For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it."

Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart, for you have heard my words; in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise. The Lord is exalted, yet the lowly he sees, and the proud he knows from afar. Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me; against the anger of my enemies you raise your hand. Your kindness, O Lord, endures forever; forsake not the work of your hands.

Brothers and sisters: You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And even when you were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.

One of his disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test." He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend has arrived from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' and he says, 'Do not bother me; the door is locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. "I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds; to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Excerpts from Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138:1-8; Colossians 2:12-14; and Luke 11:1-13