

17TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)

Our scripture passage comes from the Gospel of Luke 11:1-13. In this text Jesus instructs the disciples how to pray by giving them the Lord's Prayer. Jesus then goes on to teach the disciples about the need to pray with boldness, perseverance and trust for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave this prayer to be the one prayer that would form Disciples throughout history. That is why the Lord's Prayer is of greatest importance in the Christian tradition: our lives are supposed to be changed by it.

The text of the Lord's Prayer appears in two different versions in the New Testament. In addition to this passage from the Gospel of Luke, the more familiar and more extensive version is contained in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Mt 6:9-13). Interestingly, however, the Matthean version of the Lord's Prayer does not appear in the Lectionary readings for Sunday. Because of the importance of the Lord's Prayer for Christian disciples, this Gospel reflection will incorporate elements from both the Matthean and Lucan versions. In the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke, Jesus presents the Lord's Prayer as an explicit instruction for the disciples so that we will pray for the "right things" and in the "right way". Jesus prayed many of the same petitions found in the Lord's Prayer during His life and ministry. The Gospel of Matthew specifically instructs Christians to "not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do" (v. Mt 6:7). This is an important perspective on the purpose of Christian prayer as distinct from certain forms of prayer in the ancient world. In pagan temples, prayer was intended to change the minds of the gods so as to get them to do what people wanted. That is why the multiplication of words and phrases was important-it was all designed to convince the gods. However, Christian prayer is very different. Its purpose is not to change God's mind but to change us as disciples. Our heavenly Father knows what we need better than we do! The purpose of Christian prayer, then, is intended to open our minds and hearts so that we can know the will of God and do it with eagerness, generosity, and trust. Prayer reminds us of our dependence on God and allows us to more clearly recognize the presence of God in our lives.

- *What do you pray for? Who do you pray to?*
- *Is your prayer an attempt to change God, or are you seeking to be changed by God?*

Jesus gave us this prayer for a reason. It has the power to change us. But this can occur only when we are conscientious and intentional about our prayer. Let's study the Lord's Prayer for a moment and see what Jesus wants to teach us about being a Disciple. The following reflection will hopefully help us to appreciate this prayer more deeply and is based on the more complete version found in the Gospel of Matthew which incorporates all the elements of the version found in the Gospel of Luke.

"Our"-Both the Matthean and Lukan versions of the Lord's Prayer are presented as the communal public prayer and not the private prayer of an individual. This is an important statement because it reminds US' that disciples always pray as members of the Family of God. If we are only interested in our own needs or if we seek to exclude others from our lives and faith then we cannot authentically say "our". Jesus did not each us to say "My Father" or "give me my bread" but to make our prayer inclusive of others and their needs. This prayer is meant to form the way we understand our relationship with God and the openness disciples necessarily have for the needs of others as fellow members of the Family of God.

- *How are you tempted to be self-centered in your prayer?*
- *How can disciples put limits on whom they are willing to consider their "brother and sister" in Christ?*

"Father in heaven"-This is an interesting combination of images. Jesus prayed with the word "Abba" which connoted an intimate relationship with God the Father. Our Lord wanted us as disciples to share in that intimate trusting relationship He enjoyed and witnessed. The term "Father"; then, brings out the immanent and intimate relationship into which we are invited. It also calls us to willingly open our hearts to others as brothers and sisters of one family of faith. The phrase "who art in heaven" emphasizes God's transcendence and power as Lord of heaven and earth. It also reminds us that that there is more to life than our current experience and that God calls us to choose the values of heaven over those of earth. God is both immanent and transcendent; the Lord cares for us with the tenderness of a Father and as the sovereign Power over all creation. As we prayerfully express our needs in an act of trusting confidence, the Lord asks us to understand and accept His plan for our lives including our ultimate destiny to with God in heaven.

- *When do you most readily relate to God as immanently and intimately present in your life?*
- *When do you relate to God as the transcendent Lord of heaven and earth?*
- *What is the danger of relating to God only as Father (immanent presence) or as "in heaven" (transcendent presence)?*

"Hallowed by thy name"-God's name is already holy. This petition is a prayer that the holiness of God be respected, honored, and manifested in the lives of disciples. We show to the world the holiness of God by how we live and by the reverence we show for divine affairs. We proclaim the holiness of God by how we act in God's presence while in both the sacred space of a church and the secular environment of the world. If we are not actively witnessing to the holiness of God in our actions then we are not living out this petition in our lives and our prayer has become just a multiplication of words.

- *How do you show reverence for the holiness of God while in the sacred space of a church?*
- *How do you honor the holiness of God in your office and your home?*
- *How do you honor the holiness of God in your friendships?*

"Thy kingdom come"-This petition reminds us that disciples seek the active and practical reign of God in every part of their lives. Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God and that requires us to seek the Lord's direction in our marriages, families, offices, friendships, hobbies, and other interests. It can be easy to compartmentalize our faith so that we only seek the Lord's direction in some parts of life but not others. This petition expresses the desire to accept the Lordship of God in every part of our lives.

- *When do people usually find it easy to accept God's Lordship?*
- *When do people tend to have difficulty accepting God's Lordship?*
- *How do you express the desire for more complete submission to God's reign in your life?*

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"-This petition is found only in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer and is an explicit extension of the previous petition for the coming of the kingdom. Christian disciples are to pray first and foremost for God's will to be done in all things rather than only trying to convince God to grant our own desires. Jesus expressed this same prayer on the night of His betrayal and arrest (cf. Lk 22:42 and Mt 26:39). While Jesus encourages disciples to pray for our perceived needs, the Lord's own example and this passage remind us to always end our prayer by expressing our hope for God's will to be done and for our ability to accept and desire that divine will. God's will can be perfectly manifest in heaven because of the spiritual harmony that exists among the angels and saints. It is human free will and weakness that obstruct God's will from taking place on earth.

- *What space do you provide in your prayer so that you can hear and know God's will for your life?*
- *When do you find it easier or more tempting to do your will rather than do what you know to be God's will?*
- *How does the prayer of Jesus in the garden help form the way you will pray about your personal needs or wishes?*

"Give us this day our daily bread"-This verse is difficult to translate and can have various layers of meaning. On the surface, it functions as a prayer for the communal needs of daily sustenance. It should be emphasized once again that this is a collective prayer and not an individual prayer. As such, the human family prays for those resources needed by the entire human family for daily survival. This challenges us to

also recognize that we bear the responsibility of being good stewards of the resources we have received so that we will distribute God's generosity to those in need throughout the world. The blessings we receive are not only for our individual benefit but so that we can be instruments of blessing for others. On a deeper level, however, this petition is about much more than just the needs of daily sustenance. This deeper level is identified by the word used to translate "daily". The Greek word *epiousioun* is very difficult to translate but the most literal meaning would be "supernatural" or "higher essence" or "being from above". All these terms point to a more spiritual meaning for "daily bread" and indicate that it refers to a specific type of bread that is "supernatural" and has the ability to give us our "being from above". That, of course, is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is what makes us the Body of Christ; it is the supernatural bread of heavenly being that forms the Church. This petition then is a prayer to be formed into the Body of Christ through the regular gift of the Eucharist-the very presence of Jesus.

- *How does the interpretation of charitable distribution for the world's resources challenge you?*
- *How does the spiritual interpretation of "daily bread" as the Eucharist affect the way you will pray the Lord's Prayer? This petition is really praying for us as disciples to be changed in our attitude and identity; what can prevent that change from actually taking place in a disciple's life?*

"Forgive us our debts (sins) as we forgive our debtors (those who sin against us)"-Jesus has offered several teachings on the inter-connection between personal forgiveness by God and willingness to forgive others (cf. Mt 6:14, Mt 18:35, Mk 11:25 and Lk 6:37). There are two dimensions to this petition as well. The first dimension has to do with the action of forgiving and implies that divine forgiveness cannot take place when an individual is unwilling to forgive others. In refusing to forgive others we are actually closing ourselves off to God's forgiveness. The second dimension concerns the quality of our forgiveness and reminds us that if our forgiveness is half-hearted and full of conditions then that is how God will forgive us (cf. Mt 7:2 also Mk 4:24). We want God to forgive us completely and to give us second chances to move forward in freedom. Accordingly, that is how the Lord wants us to forgive others. Why do you think Jesus had so many teachings about forgiveness?

- *What are typical conditions people place on their forgiveness of others?*
- *What can lead someone to refuse forgiveness to another person and what does that do to the spiritual life?*
- *What can lead a person into despair and erroneously thinking that their sin is too great for God to forgive and what would you say to that person?*

"Lead us not into temptation"-Jesus instructed His disciples to pray for similar protection

during His agony in the Garden (cf. Lk 22:40, 46; Mk 14:38, and Mt 26:41).

Temptation and testing were experienced in the life of Jesus as challenges to His identity and mission. This challenge was true both in the desert after our Lord's baptism and on the cross. It is only by remaining faithful to His identity as God's obedient Son that our Lord could pass these tests even to the point of enduring suffering and death. Jesus knows that we are weak and that our human condition all too often leads us to give in to the desires of the flesh rather than remain obedient to God's will for our lives. For this reason the Lord encourages us to pray for protection from temptation lest we succumb to disobedience and reject our identity as children of our Heavenly Father. Part of the growth in Christian maturity is the development of self-awareness so that we know areas of personal weakness and can avoid placing ourselves in situations of temptation. Thus, when we pray "lead us not into temptation" then we should be prepared to practice the self-discipline it takes to avoid known occasions of sin.

- *What are typical ways in which people put themselves in known situations of temptation?*
- *Who do people tend to blame when they fall into sin? What are practical ways in which people have altered their behavior in order to avoid known occasions of sin?*

"Deliver us from evil (Evil)"-This petition is contained only in the Matthean version of the Lord's Prayer and can be interpreted to mean either deliverance from situations of evil or from the power of Evil personified that is Satan. It is important to remember that disciples are not exempt from the confrontation with evil in the world. The reality is that we live in a world that is weakened by sin and that we are called to fight daily against the forces of evil within us and around us. This prayer does not seek preservation from the Christian confrontation with evil; rather, this prayer seeks protection from being overwhelmed by the evil we face. Christians are called to confront and eradicate evil in whatever form we find it: institutional, national, personal, cultural, professional, or relational. Sometimes it is easier to become complacent with the presence of evil than it is to continue the fight to eradicate it. When we become complacent with evil in our midst then we have been overcome by it.

- *How can people be tempted to tolerate sinful behavior rather than pray for the grace of authentic conversion?*
- *How does this final petition challenge you to confront evil? What cultural values can encourage a person to become complacent with evil?*
- *As you read this reflection on the Lord's Prayer, which of those phrases offer new insights for you?*

Teresa of Avila said, "prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing

between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us".

- *What is the personal change this prayer can effect in your life as a result of praying it intentionally and persistently every day?*