

17C SML 2019
LK 11:1-13

For people of faith, faith is always a safe place to start, and what comfort people of faith take in faith. Friday night, I had a conversation with a man who has no faith. And it was difficult. Because his thought was relativistic. His starting point was what he thought, and not what God thinks. Pretty subjective . . .

Recently, I was called to Medford Care Center, as I have many times before. A patient was actively dying and her son requested a priest. As I walked past the nurse's station, the hospice nurse told me the son was in the room and he is very upset and feels guilty that he had to bring his mother here in the first place, as she was forever telling him she wanted to go home . . . all of the heartache that comes with aging parents. So I prayed with his Mom and him, and gave her the Last Rites, and then I turned to him and asked, "Are you a man of faith?" And he said, "Yes, I am," which gave me a safe place to start, to talk to him about His Mom and her relationship with God. Since the day your Mom was born, what has she been waiting for? What are all of us waiting for? To see God. To see and touch the face of Almighty God, and your Mom is very close to that grace filled moment . . . Feather the song, "Well Done" by the Afters.

Google it. I cry every time I hear it!

If being a person of faith is essentially about right relation to God, it is clear that speaking with, and listening to, God, is an essential part of it. That is why Our Blessed Lord prayed. And that is why Our Blessed Lord taught us how to pray. Hence the Our Father in today's Gospel:

- ✓ not the "My Father", but the "Our Father"
- ✓ not "my daily bread," but "our daily bread"
- ✓ not "my trespasses," but "our trespasses."

It is true that prayer is very personal. It is in fact, so personal that, as St. John tells us in the Book of Revelation, God addresses every person by a name that no one else even knows. (2:17) And so my prayer life is completely different from your prayer life, and your prayer life and your prayer life. Prayer is very personal.

If prayer is so very personal, then why the Church? Why the "Our Father" and not the "My Father?" Because prayer needs to be fed and guided, which is why we need:

1. prayer in words (those "Church" prayers so beautiful we memorize them),
2. prayer in images (so beautiful in "Church" art, Church statues, and stained glass windows)
3. and prayer in thoughts and concepts, so well explained in the

teaching of the “Church.”

For without these aids to prayer, our own prayer and our image of God become subjective and end up reflecting us more than reflecting God.

Our Holy Father Benedict has a very striking take on the passage of the golden calf in the Book of Exodus. You will recall that much like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in this morning’s first reading, who had wondered far from God, the Israelites’ focus was far from God, all because Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain. And so Aaron fashioned a molten calf. Benedict has this to say about the account:

The cult conducted by the high priest Aaron is not meant to serve any of the false gods of the heathen. Outwardly, the people remained completely attached to the same God. They wanted to glorify the God who led Israel out of Egypt and believed that they may very properly represent his mysterious power in the image of a bull calf. And yet it is a falling away from the worship of God to idolatry in two ways. First . . . the people cannot cope with the invisible, remote, and mysterious God. They want to bring him down to their own world, into what they can see and understand. Worship is no longer going up to God, but drawing God down into one’s own world. (And second), the worship of the golden calf is a self-generated cult. When Moses stays away for too long, and God himself becomes inaccessible, the people just fetch him back. Worship becomes a feast that the community gives itself, a festival of self-affirmation. Instead

of being worship of God, it becomes a circle closed in on itself: eating, drinking and making merry. The narrative of the golden calf is a warning about any kind of self-initiated and self-seeking worship. Ultimately, it is no longer concerned with God but with giving oneself a nice little alterative world, manufactured from one's own resources.¹

Without the guidance of the Church, one's personal prayer life can go in any number of directions, and usually, in no direction at all.

One of my favorite past times when I'm on vacation is powerwalking on the boardwalk. And for most of the walk, I pray: the Rosary, and then private intentions asking God to shower His blessings on everyone and everything. So two weeks ago, I was in Lavallette, and powerwalking along and as I was coming closer to two young women, one pushing a baby in the stroller, and as I'm powerwalking past them, I overheard their conversation. "I'm not getting the baby baptized," I heard. "I'm Catholic, but I don't practice." "I'm Catholic too but I never practiced. My parents never took me to Church. "Don't get me wrong. I believe in God, in a higher power . . ." "I maybe 'a higher Spirit'", the mother said . . .

And I'm in the middle of my Rosary listening to this, and I'm now praying, "Should I say something?" And if I do, what should I say? Jesus, Mary and Joseph, what should I do, and I'm going back and

forth in my head, and I don't want to confront her, but clearly she hasn't gotten far in her prayer life with God without the Church if she can't even decide what to call Him: God, Power, Spirit . ." yada, yada, yada . . .

So I decided I would say, "Excuse me, but I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. I'm Father Dan. I'm the pastor at St. Mary of the Lakes in Medford and it sounds to me like you might need some guidance, and maybe this is a God wink, (or a higher power wink or a Spirit wink if that's what you prefer to say) and I would love to talk to you if you want to give me a call."

I thought:

- ✓ that's good,
- ✓ non-confrontational,
- ✓ gives her time to think about it,
- ✓ puts the ball in her court,

yep that's what I'm going to do, so I turn around to powerwalk past them a second time, only to find they were gone. But I was ready for the next opportunity. I decided to powerwalk with a bottle of water on my waste, so if I run into them again, I'll just baptize the baby right there on the boardwalk 😊

In his Rule, St. Benedict coined the phrase, "Our mind must be

in accord with our voice.” (Rule 19,7) Normally, thought precedes word. But praying as Jesus taught, praying with the Church as our guide, is the other way around. The word, the voice goes ahead of us, and our minds must adapt to it. For on our own, “we do not know how to pray as we ought” says St. Paul (Romans 8:26) because we are too far removed from God, like God and Moses on top of the mountain, and Aaron and the Israelites and the young Mom on the boardwalk at the bottom of the mountain.

¹ The Spirit of the Liturgy, pp. 33-34.