

Rev. Kevin V. Madigan
Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel NYC **July 28, 2019**
17th Sunday of Year C **Luke 11:1-13**

A friend once told me of an experience he had when visiting a Shinto temple in Japan. It is the custom for worshippers at the temple, upon entering, to purchase some large wooden discs. When inside, the worshipper would then throw the discs into a wooden box, whereupon they would make a loud, rumbling noise. The significance of this religious practice was that the loud noise would get the attention of the resident gods. Once the gods were aware that someone was present seeking their assistance, they might then pay attention to the worshipper's prayer-request.

In today's Gospel Jesus teaches us how to pray. From the outset He makes it clear that the God whom we address in prayer is not some distant, distracted deity who is unconcerned about our needs, and whose attention we have to capture. Rather, Jesus instructed His disciples to call God "Father," and more importantly He told them to use the word "Abba," which in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, was the word that a child would use to speak to his or her father, something like "Daddy" in our language. Jesus is telling them, telling us, that our God is not some distant potentate, in whose presence we are to cower in fear, but One who desires to be as close to us as a loving Parent, One who wants us to give us the confidence that He will never let us down, One who is always on our side.

"Hallowed be your name." When we pray that God's name be revered, that the holiness of God may be more evident in our lives. Yet because our lives are not always identified with God, too often we can't discover His name, His presence, His power within us. We then find ourselves cut off from the very source of life. We may even condemn ourselves, even though God does not; we may become resigned to our fate, though God is not. We may judge ourselves and others according to the iron law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth," but God's is always a law of "much forgiveness."

A phrase like "Your kingdom come" shows just how subversive and revolutionary is the Lord's prayer, and why the first Christians were viewed as such a threat by the religious and political powers of their day. It reveals that our allegiances to church and state and all the other institutions we value are certainly legitimate, but they are not ultimate—they can make no final claim upon us. That which does exercise an ultimate claim upon us is the core of Jesus preaching—the coming of God's kingdom—that state of affairs when God's compassionate love and justice will be realized among all humankind. So, every institution on earth has legitimate authority over us in so far as it advances and promotes the dignity of human beings, made in God's image and

likeness—and any institution that threatens or attacks human dignity loses its legitimacy and power over us.

“Thy will be done.” The God whom Jesus reveals is not some Cosmic Puppeteer who wants to pull all the strings in our lives, but again like a loving parent who desires only what is good for us. Perhaps another way of understanding these words, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” is “O God, may all Your dreams for creation come true.” It resembles a mother or father who has great dreams for their child, or a coach who has great dreams for a team, or an artist who has great dreams for a novel or a painting or song he is creating, or a teacher who has great dreams for his or her students. God has a dream for each of us and for all humanity, so we are praying that that dream be fulfilled.

“Give us each day our daily bread” or supply us with what we really need. Help us distinguish what we need from what we want; help us see when enough is enough, and not be fueled by infantile fantasies that crave more and more and more. Help us to live within our means, to value what we possess, and not be preoccupied with worries about tomorrow.

But do we really mean what we say, when we pray, “Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us?” Not much needs be said in commentary about words so stark, but for hurts that still run too deep to accommodate forgiveness, perhaps we can pray to someday to want to forgive. It is only forgiveness that will allow something new to happen in our lives and the lives of others, and not simply the past repeating itself over and over again, right now.

And finally, “Do not subject us to the final test,” which for the disciples of Jesus was the test of persecution, whereby they would have to back up with their lives the gospel vision that Jesus had entrusted to them. For us, the choice may not appear to be quite so dramatic, but it is nonetheless real—a choice we affirm daily by the degree to which we work to enhance the values of the kingdom of God that Jesus preached, embodied, and incarnated—the dignity of and respect for every one of God's creatures.

It is at the very end of today's passage that Jesus promises what we can be guaranteed we will always receive when we pray, and that is the Holy Spirit, and more precisely what St. Paul calls the “gifts of the Spirit.” What are they? They are the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord, which really means a sense of wonder in the face of all God has created. Jesus does not promise that when we pray we will win the lottery, but that we will have the resources we need to make our way through the challenges of life. And that may be

what we need most of all.