

Homily
17th Sunday of the Year C-July 28, 2019

In 1966, after spending four years in Quebec at the seminary, I left to go to Rome for four more years of seminary - eight years altogether. My father would wonder every now and then if it really took that long to become a priest or was I just slow. In any case, I sailed from New York City with lots of people waving at the passengers from the dock, just like you see in the movies. Seven days later the ship arrived in Naples. It was the middle of September, with the squalor and humidity of the summer still there.

After being greeted by another seminarian, the first words that I heard were “never pay what they want to be paid....always bargain.” To me, an item priced at \$.10 cost \$.10, but it was quickly explained to me that, there, \$.10 was a point of departure and the price could go down, never up, but at the end both the buyer and the seller had to look like they just sacrificed, but deep down the buyer thinking he had a bargain, and the seller happy to have gotten money in exchange.

This sense of bargaining persisted throughout my four years in Rome. Whenever I read the passage that we used today for the first reading, I am reminded of those bargaining days in Rome as well as other times in my life that I have had to bargain: negotiating a contract, buying a car, persuading someone to do what he does not want to do.

Abraham and God are bargaining over the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God wants to destroy them because of their sins; Abraham wants to save the cities especially because some of his relatives are there. Today’s passage ends with the cities being saved....but that is only temporary.

We sometimes approach prayer as Abraham approached God to save Sodom and Gomorrah. We try to bargain with God. We do not like the expected outcome of something in life....sickness, disease, economic disaster, children making poor choices, parents living destructive lives....So, we figure that God can do all...so, we bargain with God.

Is bargaining with God a good thing to do? Well, it worked with Abraham, and it worked in today’s gospel. But is prayer simply bargaining with God?

So, what exactly is prayer? How are we supposed to pray? How do we achieve that union with God that allows us to speak directly with him? The apostles were not sure how to do that. So, they ask Jesus, who gives them that simple prayer known to all Christians, the *Our Father*. Spiritual writers tell us that it, after the Eucharist, is the perfect prayer.

There is an acronym that spells out what prayer is all about and why the *Our Father* is the perfect prayer. The acronym is ACTS. A=adoration; C=contrition (sorrow); T=thanksgiving; and S=supplication. In our common understanding of prayer, the “S” word, supplication, asking, begging and bargaining as did Abraham, is what we commonly understand by prayer.

Adoration of God in prayer is so very important. In adoration, we recognize who we truly are and who God is and we come to understand better the gap that exists between God and us. The apostle Thomas adored God in these simple words: “My Lord and my God!” In the *Our Father* we adore God when we say: “Hallowed be thy name.”

Contrition or sorrow is needed in our life. True sorrow is very difficult because it requires us to admit that we have sinned, that we have done something wrong to offend God and to offend another. In the *Our Father* we say “forgive us our sins” and we admit that we are in deperate need of God’s mercy and that we are not all powerful.

Thanksgiving is an annual event in November, but it should be part of our daily relationship with God. Our whole Eucharistic prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for our salvation in Christ. The *Our Father* contains no direct words of thanksgiving because true adoration means that we give thanks to God for all gifts especially the gift of life itself which is a sharing in God’s life.

Supplication is clear in the *Our Father* when we pray “Give us this day our daily bread.” The answer to our prayers is always given because Jesus says in today’s gospel: “Ask and you will receive.” The response we often get is God doesn’t listen; I don’t get what I want. That is not what Jesus promised. He told us to petition, and we will receive. He never promised that we would receive exactly what we ask for. What we receive may ultimately be much better than what we thought we wanted.

Another way to phrase all of this is: Voice of Jesus, call us when we stray. Eyes of Jesus, look on us in our need. Face of Jesus smile on us when we need assurance. Hands of Jesus, reach out to us when we grow weary. Arms of Jesus, lift us when we fall. Blood of Jesus wash us clean. Body of Jesus, feed us in our hunger. Heart of Jesus, help us to love as you have loved us. AMEN