



Homily for 7/28/2019

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Do you pray? Ordinary Time is meant to give us a detailed walk through of the Christian Life. We work our way through important parts of what it means to follow Christ. In today's readings we talk about a very necessary aspect of Christian living: prayer. Jesus prayed and He teaches us to pray. So if you don't take time to pray, you are missing out on the most essential part of what it means to be a Catholic Christian.

Now prayer is not just learning a bunch of rote prayers, though that has something to it. We all can memorize words on a page. But that doesn't mean it is a prayer until it is done with intention. Just like one can memorize the words of a poem and recite it in a monotone voice with no passion. It only becomes a poem when its meaning is grasped through inflection and emotion. So, too, we can very easily get swayed by the temptation to just rattle off the rote prayers without putting our soul into it. It was this soul that the Disciples were after when they asked Jesus to teach them to pray. As good Jewish men, they knew plenty of rote prayers, especially the Psalms that they memorized since their youth. So, when they asked Jesus to pray, it wasn't because they needed content; rather they needed the spirit of prayer. And they had seen Jesus praying and wanted to know that.

Jesus's answer to His disciples and to those who still ask that question, is given in three parts.

First, He does it in the Lord's Prayer. In the Gospel of Luke, we get the short version. In the Gospel of Matthew there will be a fuller version that we are used to saying. I would focus on the one phrase "give us each day our daily bread". The Greek word *epiousios*, translated as 'daily', is literally translated as 'supersubstantial' - in other words, supernatural bread that does more than sustain our bodies. Of course, this is directly linked with the Eucharist, as Jesus will call himself the Bread of Life. However, the translation 'daily' is still a good thing for us to emphasize here too as we need to daily feed our souls just as we daily feed our bodies. Daily prayer is an imperative for Christians. Daily prayer is not optional for the Catholic Christian. So many of us are anorexic Christians because we do not partake of this daily nutrition of communion with God in prayer. So this is the first lesson.

Then he gives them a parable about prayer - the parable of the persistent friend. The Greek word for the friend's 'persistence' is *anaideia*, which could actually be translated as 'lack of respect' or 'shamelessness' or 'breaking of all conventions'. The friend breaks etiquette in his late-night request: he shamelessly asks for something even at the wrong time. I'm reminded of the story of Darrin. He is a regular who comes to the parish asking for help, which we have given many times. One time he was told to come back the next day, so he showed up bright and early, while we were having our Wednesday morning book study. Instead of waiting in front of the office, he came down to Varallo Hall here to the table that we were sitting at. Even as I was reading out of the book in a group of 12 people he came right up to me and interrupted me to ask for what he was seeking. I smiled and told him I would be up to the office after the book study, and so he waited. But I thought, "that's the way God wants us to approach him!" - unabashed, breaking protocol just like as if we were the child of the President breaking into the Oval office to ask his father for what he needs! That's how Jesus wants us to pray. This is of course modeled for us in the first reading when Abraham very shamelessly and persistently intercedes for the 50, the 45, the 30, the 20, and even the 10 righteous that may be in the city. Almost like haggling with a storekeeper in Jerusalem! But notice, that he does it shamelessly but still with a profound sense of humility. Humble and persistent. He is humble and persistent because he knows that his family - Lot, his wife and their children - are in Sodom, and it is about to be destroyed. God will eventually give Lot and his family a chance to escape, even as an answer to the



prayer, because of his compassion for him. It isn't about the actual words or the eloquence of our prayer - it is more about the insistence, trust and even desperation that makes them powerful in God's ears.

The third part of Jesus' answer comes in the form of an analogy. He ties us back in to his first statement - Our Father. The analogy is that if you know how to be a good father and not harm your children, how much more will God our Father give us what we truly need. But he goes even deeper. The thing he is promising to give is not just bread and eggs, that is, material things. He is prepared to give even His own Holy Spirit to those who ask for it. When was the last time you asked for God to give you His Holy Spirit? We ask all the time for worldly things like bread and money and success. But what about asking for the mind of God - He said he is ready to give it to you if you ask. Why pray for lesser things when you can ask for Wisdom itself. There is a beautiful prayer taught by Catholic Tradition:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

So our prayer should be daily, persistent and humble, and should be focused on higher things! Instead of getting mad at God, who like a good father, won't give us the candy we ask for before dinner, rather let's turn to Him in trust as a Father, Our Father, and shamelessly pray that His Will of Love be done. This is how you are to pray.