

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time year C

Luke 11: 1-13

This Gospel text alone is so rich that we could spend all day (and beyond!) peeling it apart and feeding ourselves.

Worry not; we won't be here all day.

God forbid: I might get assassinated, and you might change religions!

Because of its richness, we need to focus on a portion of Christ's discourse.

I prefer to open a portion and let the love and the light come forth, rather than give an *overview* which risks leaving the scriptures largely closed.

We will focus on this condensed version of the prayer we traditionally call the "Our Father"

(Luke includes 5 petitions, as distinguished from Matthew who includes 7 petitions, which is what we traditionally pray)

We will focus on this prayer, keeping in mind a few important truthful thoughts, drawn from what Jesus subsequently says about prayer:

- God always wants to give, and always does
- God ultimately wants to give the One whom we can call "Gift", *the Gift*, (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 38, art. 1 & 2; II, II, Q. 38, art 9, obj. 3)

the Holy Spirit, Who moves us deep inside towards the Father, i.e. teaches us how to pray.

Recall the words of St. Paul (Romans 8:26), "We do not know how to pray... but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings".

So, Jesus gives us a prayer.

Jesus does not simply give us

- words to say
- a religious formula

It is tempting to think so, for this prayer, the "Our Father", the "Lord's Prayer" (i.e. *given by the Lord*)

is given in response to a request from the disciples to be taught *how* to pray.

Interestingly, strictly speaking, Jesus does not teach the disciples how to pray.

Jesus teaches them (and us) *what* to pray.

Jesus teaches us

- where we are to direct our hearts and minds, i.e. our person
- where we are to look in faith, hope, and love

Such is prayer: to gaze upon God in faith, full of hope, with love.

Saint Therese of Lisieux defines prayer as "a surge of the heart; a simple gaze turned toward heaven; a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

(Manuscripts autobiographiques, C 25r)

In giving this prayer, Jesus precisely invites this focus, so that our prayer truly be prayer, i.e. a raising of our hearts and minds to God, "from whom all good things come".

This prayer is thus clearly not formulaic, one whose recitation has magical effects.

In other words, we do ourselves wrong in thinking,

"If I say it enough times, something is bound to happen."

If something happens, it is not because the words are magical,

but because God *always* mercifully responds to *every* cry of the human heart.

This prayer is essentially a great expression of, call it, *divine desire*.

Let us then *just begin* to peel it apart.

“Our Father”

Father: the Source of us and of all that exists, whom we cannot adequately name.

“Father” precisely signifies transcendent source; it does not signify *maleness* (a whole other touchy ball of wax, that we will have to tackle at *another* time).

Our: We each have a personal relationship with God,
like that of a child who trusts and receives.

Yet we are joined to one another like siblings, by this very God, *our* Father.

“Hallowed by your name”

OK: we are not trying to flatter God so to gain “brownie” points.

What exactly is Jesus inviting us to say?

In the Bible, the *name* signifies the *person*.

Thus: Hallowed be *you*, God; it’s that simple.

Now, this is not a wish, as though we are wishing holiness upon God.

FYI: God is already holy!

It is an *acknowledgment* of the sanctity of God.

In acknowledging the sanctity of God,

we are acknowledging that there is *only goodness* in God.

(cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 36, art. 1, resp. 1:

“By holy we signify the purity of divine goodness.”)

“Your kingdom come”

We are not primarily asking God to bring about a certain way of life on earth.

This petition can be restated: “You, King, reign in us; fill us with your love and light.”

St. Cyprian (Bishop, north Africa, +258) said,

“It may even be ...that the Kingdom of God means Christ Himself”.

(*De Dom.*, orat. 13: PL 4, 528A)

Then, after these three petitions, in the light of

- the union with God that we beseech
- the indwelling of Christ that we desire

we petition with respect to ourselves.

Petitioning with respect to ourselves is not trying to twist God’s arm; God has no arms!

“Give us each day our daily bread”

We say at least three things.

1. We express our hunger for Christ in the Eucharist.
2. We ask God to be Providence for/in the small daily things.
3. We ask God to help us to make use of the material things that we have such that we grow closer to Him.

“Forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us.”

Oh, love it! Sooo, the measure for our being forgiven is our forgiveness of others?

Guess who is up the creek!! All of us!

Well, remember: this prayer is a great expression of *desire*; it is actually quite simple.

To be forgiven, my heart needs to be open.

An open heart is a willing heart.

In this petition, I ask for forgiveness, while expressing my *willingness* to forgive.

“Do not subject us to the final test.”

The Old Testament speaks of severe trial before the end of the age.

God does not subject anyone to any trial, although He surely allows trial.

We are not asking God to refrain from bad moods, in which He might subject us to trial.

We are asking to be spared trial,

and if not spared, to remain focused on Him, and remain loving, in the midst of it.

In this petition we abandon ourselves to Christ.

“How much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

The “Our Father”, a great expression of deep desire.

In a sense, we can say that the ultimate response to our desires,

Desires expressed in a particular way and wisely organized in the “Our Father” is:
the Holy Spirit.

Doesn't sound very romantic, does it? It is

- more than romantic
- more than we can ever romantically envision

Let us receive the Holy Spirit.

Every time we receive the Eucharist, we receive a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.