

July 24, 2016
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 11:1-13

1 Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." 2 He said to them, "when you pray, say:

Father,
hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come.
3 Give us each day our daily bread
4 And forgive us our sins.
For we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,
And do not subject us to the final test."



5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him.' 7 And he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything. 8 "I tell you, if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

9 "And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 10 What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? 11 Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? 12 "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Background

The gospel for last week portrayed Mary as a good disciple, sitting at the feet of her master. Despite Martha's concern, Jesus did not suggest that Mary leave his side to help her sister. Luke follows the story of Martha and Mary with the disciples asking Jesus how to pray. Jesus not only gives them a way to pray, but also teaches them the attitude that is needed as one comes to God in prayer. The description of that encounter between Jesus and the disciples is the gospel text for this week.

Luke often describes Jesus as a person of prayer.

Luke 3:21 Jesus prays after his baptism

Luke 6:12 Jesus prays before sending out the twelve

Luke 9:18 Jesus prays before asking his disciples who the people think he is

Luke 9:29 Jesus prays on the mountain at the Transfiguration

Luke 11:1 (today's text)

Luke 22:39-46 Jesus prays before his arrest, trial, beating, and death

In prayer, Jesus finds strength and the guidance he needs to face those especially challenging points in his life. In today's text, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray as John has taught his disciples. They are looking for more than instruction about how to pray. They are asking for a prayer form that will identify them as disciples of Jesus. It was common for a religious leader to teach his disciples to pray.

The prayer itself has an unmistakable communal aspect; all the pronouns are plural. It has three movements: invoking God, glorifying God, and finally petitioning God. The term "Father" suggests a relationship that is

both intimate and childlike. In the prayer, its use invites us into relationship with God through Jesus. The prayer asks that God be given the honor that is due. This points to the end time when the fullness of God's plan will be manifest. The prayer for daily bread assumes continuous giving by God and a constant dependence on God. The petition that God be forgiving carries with it the understanding that those asking are, themselves, forgiving of others. Lastly, the prayer asks that we not be overwhelmed by temptation.

Following the instruction itself, Jesus uses a parable to instruct the disciples that they should be persistent in their prayer. In the parable, the neighbor responds to the request for three loaves because of his neighbor's persistence, not because it was the right thing to do, nor because he will face public embarrassment if he does not. It is worth noting that the request is not made on behalf of the requestor himself, and that he seems to be willing to risk his neighbor's anger to care for his guest. Finally, Jesus teaches his disciples that God knows how to give good things to those who ask, but they must ask.

The vast majority of people to whom Jesus preached were very aware of how little control they had over their own lives. Governments, religious institutions, and the few wealthy of the day made most of the decisions for people. Developments in science and medicine, the industrial revolution, and emphasis on the self are all factors that have made dramatic changes in our perception of how much control we have over our life situations. The context in which we strive to be people of prayer, deeply relying on God as a child would, is very different from that of Jesus' disciples.

Reflection Questions

1. Who taught you to pray? Are they the same people who taught you your first prayers? How did they teach you? Was there anything you remember about their prayer life?
2. When you think of the people of Jesus' day, how much more control over your life do you think you have than the people of Jesus' day had over theirs?
3. How has your awareness of how much control you have changed in the last five years?
4. Have you ever wanted to ask God to teach you how to pray?
5. How do you address God in your personal prayer? How has the way you address God changed over time?
6. What stands out as you read Luke's account of Jesus teaching the disciples to pray?
7. If you look at your prayer through the lens of Luke's Our Father, what observations can you make?
8. The prayer in our text is 38 words long. Can you compose a complete prayer for yourself in less than 50 words?
9. The person in the parable has nothing to give to a friend that has come from a long journey to visit. The neighbor resists helping. Why would Jesus use these images to teach his disciples about prayer? What do they suggest to you?
10. Do you ever grow weary of asking God for what you need?
11. What happens within you when you encounter situations where there is nothing that you can do but pray?

The reflection and questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.

They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

