

17<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C  
PRAYER UNITES US WITH GOD, OUR FATHER

*"I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him out of friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants" (Lk. 11: 8)*

**Theme of Prayer:** In this week, the Church invites us to reflect on that aspect of our lives as Christians that is very integral and intrinsic – prayer. St. John Damascene defines prayer as "the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." Prayer from this point of view is an act of communication, a relationship between man and his God, who is rich, generous, and good. St. Luke, like the other Evangelists, present Jesus Christ as "a man of prayer." His life was characterised by constantly relating and communicating with the Father in prayer. He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3: 21), He prayed and fasted for forty days (Luke 4: 1-2), He prayed before He chose His apostles (Luke 4: 42; 6: 12), He prayed after cleansing a leper (Luke 5: 16), just to mention but very few. So, the disciples of Jesus were accustomed to His life of prayer.

**"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples:"** On this occasion, St. Luke reports that Jesus "was in a certain place praying" and when He had finished His disciples asked Him: "Lord teach us to pray." Jesus always found quiet and secluded places to pray; His regular prayer life became a source of inspiration for His disciples and roused their desire to imitate. For it is enough for the servant to be like the Master (Matthew 10: 25). It was customary for the Rabbis to teach their students some mental prayers that were recited at different hours of the day. John must have taught his disciples those kinds of prayers. But deep within the request of the disciples of Jesus was not a desire to pray like any other, except their Master. The life of their Master inspired their request. Truly, "Example is the best teacher" so goes the good old saying. How have our lives inspired others? In what ways have we been able to motivate others to do good? If Jesus, Who was God, found time to pray, how much more should I, mere mortal, seek the Face of God in prayer?

**"Say this when you pray:"** Jesus' response to the request of the disciples was immediate. Unlike in many cases that He would respond by asking a question or with a parable, Jesus responded promptly and directly with a prayer that would be the most popular prayer among His adherents and non-believers – The Our Father. Certainly, Luke's version of this prayer is different from Matthew's

version that we are more familiar with: it begins with “Father” and not “Our Father”; it is shorter, with five petitions instead of seven. Be these as it may, there is no contradiction, it is simply a matter of difference in versions. By teaching His disciples to call God “Father”, He was invariably inviting them, and all who would come to believe in Him through their teaching (John 17: 20), to share in the deep intimacy of His relationship with the Father. By calling God Father, we express our oneness and unity with the Eternal Family – God is no longer distant but as close to us as a father to his children. Being a loving, merciful and generous Father, we, His children have the confidence to approach Him in prayer. It is that childlike simplicity, surrender and trust that we should bring to our prayer.

***The Petitions:*** The five petitions in the Lukan version are shared between God and our needs. The first two seek to acknowledge God’s Name as Holy and the reign of His Kingdom on earth. God empowers man by the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to acknowledge His Name as Holy; “My soul magnifies the Lord ... Holy is His Name.” (Luke 1: 46. 49). In prayer, God and His glory and our reverence to Him, and the desire for the reign of His Kingdom of justice, love and peace on earth should come first. The other petitions cover our present needs, past sins, and future trials. God is The Great Provider, who provided a lamb for Abraham in place of Isaac, who provided manna for His children in the wilderness, and Who continues to provide “our daily bread” even today. He is merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love. He forgives us our sins, not because we deserve forgiveness but because “His Name is Mercy.” Though He allows trials to come our ways so that we can be strengthened in our love of Him, but He alone can guide us from evil and guard us lest we fall into temptation.

***“A knock at midnight”:*** To emphasise the importance of prayer and the Christian’s attitude to prayer: Jesus narrated the Parable of the Persistent Friend. A man had a travelling friend who stopped by at midnight. He had nothing to offer him – the day’s meals had been served, the dishes were all washed, the pantry was empty. In a clime where hospitality was a valued culture and a sacred duty, it was not only an embarrassment that one had nothing to offer a friend, but it was a failure not to carry out a godly duty. This explains why this man had to go knock on a friend’s closed door (in the East, no one knocked on a closed door) – it was a desperate situation that demanded a desperate action for immediate results. The friend inside responded in the negative: “Do not bother. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot

get up to give it to you.” But the man at the opposite door kept knocking. He shamelessly persisted in knocking. Jesus ended by saying: “I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him out of friendship’s sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants.” Here we can connect with Abraham persistence in appealing to God for the innocent in the city of Sodom and Gomorrah (First Reading, Genesis 18: 20-32). This parable teaches us that persistence pays in prayer as well. It is necessary to note that our persistence in prayer is not to coerce an unwilling God to give us what we want, but to develop and intensify our relationship with a generous and merciful God, Who in His abundance will supply our needs according to His riches in glory (Philippians 4: 19). Jesus concludes His teaching with an assurance and a contrast. Whoever prays with such childlike trust and shameless persistence as progressively depicted by the verbs: ask, seek, and knock, always receives what he needs or requests from God, Who unlike the earthly father is far richer, more caring, and much more generous.

***My dear friends***, our prayers do not and cannot change God. We do not pray to persuade God to change His mind. Instead, our prayers change us to unite God as His children and align with His will for us. Let us not despair when the answers do not come as and when we would want them to come, for God knows our needs, He knows what is best for us, and He knows the best time to give them to us. Let us always pray in hope knowing that we shall sing with the Psalmist: “On the day I called, You answered me, O Lord.”