

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time C (Gen 18:20-32; Col 2:12-14; Lk 11:1-13) By John H. Howard, C.J.M 2016 main masses

Jesus was a rabbi and it was normal for a rabbi to teach his disciples how to pray. Although the **“The Lord’s Prayer”** has become the most common prayer used by Christians it was not given as a formula but as a model on how to talk to God. Jewish people are very respectful of God. Even to this day they refrained from using God’s name as a sign of respect, because knowing someone’s name was considered having some power of them. Jesus respected that tradition; he did not use God name but he suggests we use a very familiar tone, a closer, even a personal title. He invites us to call God not **“Lord”** but **“Father.”** The word he uses is not the formal name father but **“Abba”** which translates more like Dad. In other words he invites us to feel a closeness even an intimacy with God and call him **“Our Dad who is in heaven.”**

We do not own God; He is not **“My Father or my Dad”** but **“Our Father.”** It is as a community, as God’s family that we pray. Christianity is a faith made to be lived in community, in relationship with God and our brothers and sisters.

We often think of prayer as the act of asking God for something. Yet Jesus begins his lesson on how to pray by saying **“Hallowed be thy name,”** which is old English for **“Blessed be your name.”** We usually thinking of a blessing as coming from God and not given to God. To bless someone means to call God’s gifts upon someone, but when we say **“Blessed be God”** as in some of the psalms, it means we give him thanks for his generosity to us. Therefore Jesus teaches us that in our prayer we begin by giving thanks to God for his generosity not asking for something. We probably all have someone in our family who only calls when they need something, Jesus suggests we begin our prayer with, **“I just want to say thank you for everything.”**

The following pointers Jesus gives us in how to pray are not requests either **“Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.”** It says we trust in what he is asking of us and therefore surrender to the guidance of his teachings and especially to his will. It is only then that we bring forth our needs: **“Give us this day our daily bread.”** Note the request covers what we need and not all we want. How often one of your children said **“I need this”** and you’ve corrected him or her by saying **“No, you want this; that is not the same as needing it.”** It is like the Hebrews in wilderness in the book of Exodus (16: 11-21); God provided them with manna but they were to gather only what they needed for one day. In other words, we shouldn’t pray to win the lottery but for what we need. It is a call to simplify our life as Pope Francis is giving us the example to do.

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sinned against us.” Forgiveness is the cost of community. It is the

cost of harmony in any relationship. It is very simple; if we want to be forgiven we have to forgive ourselves. Many times I heard people in confession asking for forgiveness but saying they can’t forgive someone else. In other words they are saying they do not want to be forgiven. Forgiving is not approving what has been done to us but giving it to God who is the judge.

“Do not subject us to the final test” or **“Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.”** There will inevitably be difficulties and temptations in our life so we call upon God to support us with his grace. Often in our pride we think we can handle it by ourselves. Jesus invites us to be humble and ask for help. Everyone is familiar with the Twelve Step Program. Its second and third steps echoes the Lord Prayer when it says: **“2. I came to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore us to sanity. 3. I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as we understood Him.”**

Jesus also adds that our prayers should be persistent and assures us that God will answer. Persistency might not be a problem but the guarantee of receiving an answer doesn’t seem to jell with our experience. Who really feels all their prayers have been answered? Nobody! How can we reconcile that with Jesus assurance in this Gospel **“For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened”** (Lk 11:10). If Jesus says so it must be true. Why then don’t we see the results we are waiting for? It has a lot to do with expectation. We miss a lot of things because we are expecting something else. After all most people missed the Messiah because they were expecting a conquering king and not a suffering servant. God answers us in what we need and not always with what we desire. However, these explanations are not satisfactory to most people. There is in fact no definite answer.

The best example I can give you comes from a recent book written by a Saint James’ parishioner of. We will be publicizing it later but I asked the author if I could mention it now because of today’s Gospel. The book is [Waiting for a Miracle. A Mother’s Journey to Unshakable Faith](#) by Dr. Cyndi Peterson. Many of you will remember how Doctors Cyndi and Drew Peterson, both physicians, lost two infant daughters one after other to a rare disease. The point of Cyndi’s book is how she prayed so hard for a miracle that never came. Both daughters died. Yet, the real miracle in the end was that through this double ordeal their family was transformed for the best. Beside hundreds of other people were positively affected and came to faith. The statue of the Blessed Virgin on the side of our church is memorial to these two children Kelly and Sarah Peterson. It is monument to faith and trust in God. The test of faith is to accept the answer we receive. **“Your Kingdom come, your will be done.”**