

# Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (c)

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

The heart of the Gospel passage is PRAYER and for certain, prayer is the heartbeat of Christian life. As we have heard earlier, Jesus did not only teach His disciples the Lord's Prayer, but He also explained to them the value of prayer using two examples. The first was about a person who went to a friend in a time of need to seek help for another friend; the second also connotes persistence, and that is to ask; to knock, and to find. Putting together everything, we find that Jesus' prayer is actually an *RSVP*.

YES, Jesus' prayer is an *RSVP*!!! The acronym stands for the French phrase, "Repondez s'il vous plait," which means, "Please respond." But when I say Jesus' prayer is an *RSVP*, what I actually mean to say is that prayer is . . . R - to relate with the Father; S - to speak with the Father; V - to venerate the Father; and P - to have patience with the Father. Let's go over it in detail:

- **To Relate.** The first letter of Jesus' invitation is the letter "R," and that is to RELATE. And so, the first thing Jesus taught us about prayer is to relate with God as our Father. While teaching about prayer, Jesus mentioned that if earthly fathers are so concerned to provide good things for their children, then what about our heavenly Father who knows even before we ask Him? (Matthew 6:8). Thus, the first condition to respond to the *RSVP* of Jesus is to relate to God as our Father.
- **To Speak.** The second letter of Jesus' invitation is the letter "S," and that is to SPEAK. I often remind myself that prayer is not a shopping list or a cosmic vending machine where we indicate what we desire and God will simply grant it. Speaking to each other is a key foundation in a relationship; therefore, in the invitation from Jesus, we are reminded that not only do we speak to our Father, but also, we need to adopt the prayerful attitude of the prophet Samuel, "Speak, O Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:7-11). And so, the second condition to respond to the *RSVP* of Jesus is to keep silent so that God can speak to us.
- **To Venerate.** The third letter of Jesus' invitation is the letter "V," and that is to VENERATE. In the Bible, to venerate stands for "regarding one's feelings with reverence." We enter into a relationship with the Father to speak with Him just as a child would speak to His Father, which is with reverence or honor. We are not only invited by Jesus to venerate God, our Father, through words, but to venerate Him in our mind, heart and strength by loving God, our Father, and our neighbors (Matthew 12:30-31). And so, the third condition to respond to the *RSVP* of Jesus is to venerate God, our Father.
- **To be patient.** The fourth letter of Jesus' invitation is the letter "P," which stands for PATIENCE. The Greek word for patience is *υπομονη (ypomoni)*. It stands for "endurance" or "to never give up" (Romans 5:4-5). St. Pope Gregory the Great called patience as "the root and guardian of all the virtues" (Gregory the Great, Homilies on the Gospels, 35). In reality, patience is the primary requirement to walk with God, our Father. God has not given up on us, therefore, we should never give up on God just like Job.

As an example of *suffering and patience*, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. *You have heard of the steadfastness of Job* (James 5:10-11)

Let's always remember that Jesus' *RSVP* for prayer is an open invitation to relate with the Father; to speak with the Father; to venerate the Father and to have patience with the Father because prayer is "the work of God" (St. Benedict of Nursia) and through our prayers, we "can bring down the rain of [God's] mercy" (St. Charbel Makhlof).

May Mary, the mother of Jesus and our mother, intercede so that we may always respond to Jesus' *RSVP*, and that is to relate with the Father; to speak with the Father; to venerate the Father; and to have patience with the Father in order to receive the rain of God's mercy upon us.