

**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski**  
**July 28, 2019**

In the last few weeks, the Gospel readings from Luke taught us to:

- Love and care for our neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and
- Listen to the Word of God as demonstrated by the narrative with Mary, the sister of Martha, who sat at the Lord's feet.

Today's readings teach us how to talk to God; how to pray to God.

But what is prayer?

Prayer, according to the Catechism and as first defined by St. John Damascene is "Raising one's mind and heart to God or requesting good things from God." (CCC2590)

In the first reading from the Book of Genesis, we hear Abraham intercede on behalf of the sinful city of Sodom. We hear Abraham, who becomes an Old Testament model for intercessory prayer, "dicker" with God in his attempt to stave-off the destruction of Sodom, which became a symbol of widespread sinfulness. Similar to the manner in which a shopper bargains with a vendor in a town market, so Abraham begins his dialogue, his prayer, by asking God to stop the obliteration of Sodom if there are but 50 innocent people in the city. Then Abraham "negotiates"

with God for a lower threshold of innocents: 45, then 40, 30, 20 and finally 10. As we all know, Abraham's prayerful efforts were in vain and God did subsequently wipe-out Sodom.

Then we turn to today's Gospel reading from Luke in which Jesus introduces a new type of prayer. Jesus' disciples had observed him praying and asked the Lord to teach them HOW to pray. Jesus' response is the prayer which we have come to know as the "Our Father," the quintessential Christian prayer. In the "Our Father," Jesus gives us five basic elements that form a pattern or structure for all prayer. (The Gospel of Matthew also includes this passage in which Jesus teaches his disciples to pray the "Our Father." For the rest of this homily, I will use the version from Matthew solely because it is more familiar to us.)

These five elements in the Our Father are **Relate, Rejoice, Receive, Request and Repent**; the 5 "R"s, which correlate to the five forms of prayer as outlined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

- **Relate (Blessing):** With the words, "***Our Father who art in heaven,***" Jesus introduces us to a spiritual **relationship** with God the Father that is markedly different from that of the Old Testament. In praying to "our Father," we are not merely praying to a deity; rather, we are praying to our Father, Abba, who loves us, provides for us and who sent his only Son to die for us and save us.

- **Rejoice (Praise):** When we pray "*hallowed be thy name*" we joyfully recognize, through praise and thanksgiving, that God is the source of every good and perfect gift and to him our praise is due. Through our prayer, in the name of Jesus, we ask to obtain God's holiness for our souls.
- **Receive (Thanksgiving) :** We voice our desire to **receive** the Word of God and for the final coming of the reign of God through Christ's return as we pray "*thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Additionally, we express our openness to God's will, to his Word, to his plan for us and the world.
- **Request (Intercession):** The intercessory prayer, "*Give us this day our daily bread*" in which "bread" is a symbol of all of our needs, is at the heart of our desire that the Father, who gave us life, will give us the nourishment that life requires: All appropriate goods and blessings, both material and spiritual, including the ultimate spiritual food, the Eucharist.
- **Repent (Petition):** When we entreat God with the petition, "*and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*" we recognize and seek forgiveness for, not only our personal sins, but those of the entire world, the evil that exists in the world. We ask

for God's merciful forgiveness **but only** after we ourselves forgive those who have transgressed against us. We also petition God to not let us succumb to the temptations of evil in the world.

So, the **5 "R"s (Relate, Rejoice, Receive, Request and Repent)** in the "Our Father" contain the structural components which can be replicated to enhance our daily prayer and spiritual life; the "Our Father" is our guide on the **"how to" of prayer**. Armed with this pattern of prayer, we can achieve a deeper communion with the Lord, here on earth and one day forever in the glory of heaven.

I conclude with my heartfelt prayer for each of you:

May our Lord Jesus Christ give you strength in temptation, endurance in trial, and gratitude in prosperity.

AMEN!