

Homily
July 28, 2019 – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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"Lord, teach us to pray ..." On the **surface** this might seem like an odd request. Jesus' disciples were certainly not uninitiated in the discipline of prayer. As righteous Jews they had certainly been brought up learning the psalms. They would have participated in the ordinary morning and evening prayers. Prayers before eating were a normal practice of the Jewish people. In fact the whole Old Testament was one huge Hebrew prayer book. Abraham's bargaining with God in the first reading was a form of prayer. Several times Moses climbed Mount Sinai or entered the Tent with the Ark of the Covenant to pray. Samson, **chained** before the Philistines ... prayed. Elijah prayed in his showdown with the priests of Baal. Esther prayed when the lives **all** the Jews in Babylon were in peril. The books of the prophets are full of prayers. The Wisdom literature is the source of deep prayerful contemplation. The Jewish disciples of Jesus **should** have been experts on prayer. So **why** the request: "... teach us to pray?"

The disciples were **certainly** schooled in the prayers and praying practices of their Jewish faith, but even so they recognized that **somehow** Jesus' level of praying **exceeded** what they were used to, it was somehow **more** than reflecting on the Torah or reciting the Psalms. And so they asked, "Lord teach us to pray." And Jesus taught them! He taught them a format, so powerful that it has had enduring value for two millennia both as a cherished **learned** prayer and as the perfect **pattern** for formulating prayers. What He taught them, of course, is what all Christians know and cherish as "*The Lord's Prayer*" or "*The Our Father*". Of course, we are all **more** used to the longer version from **Matthew's** Gospel but **today** we hear Luke's version ... a shorter ... more ... bare **bones** approach; shorter ... yet **still** containing all the essentials.

When we pray it is normal to begin with a statements like; "God, I **need** help," "Lord, **heal** me," "I **need**." "I" and "me" tend to be the **beginning** of our prayers. But Jesus began by saying: "When you pray, say: '**Father**, hallowed be your name.' ..." We are to begin by **acknowledging** and **honoring** God for **who** he is, our loving yet **almighty** Father ... followed by giving Him the praise and honor that is His **due**: "**Hallowed** be your name".

Jesus continued: 'your **kingdom** come.'" So we move on to the second part of our acknowledgement by not only **consenting** to The coming of His kingdom but also reminding ourselves of our responsibility to **work** with God to make His Kingdom on earth a **reality**.

Then ... only **after** we have fittingly acknowledged God's love and Sovereignty ... we proceed to **our** needs. He continued: "Give us each day our daily bread." When we pray these words we are praying **not** for our daily bread **alone** ... but for **all** our daily needs ... material **and** spiritual. This is not **only** an act of supplication ... but also an act of **faith** that he **will** continue to **provide** for our daily needs.

Next Jesus tells us to pray for forgiveness: "forgive us our sins for **we** ourselves forgive **everyone** in debt to us ...". We might well ask: **why** the emphasis on forgiveness? It has been said that **for-**

givenness is the greatest **obstacle** to holiness because unless we are able to forgive others, we may **not** expect God's forgiveness of **our** sins. For Jesus has told us repeatedly ... by the same measure that we forgive and judge others, we shall be forgiven and judged. Think upon the words in the Lord's Prayer "as we forgive those who trespass against us" ... **as we forgive** ... if we **are** harboring grudges against others ... we are **actually** praying that our own sins **not** be forgiven.

And finally Jesus concludes the prayer: "do not subject us to the final test." He ends His prayer by asking for **deliverance** ... so that in times of temptation and all our spiritual battles ... we do not **succumb** to the evil one and fall into sin.

Today's Gospel reading might well be described as Luke's catechism on prayer because Jesus does not stop with teaching the disciples how to pray. He continues with a story of a man waking a friend needing to borrow some bread to illustrate the need to **persevere** in prayer. Then He makes a most **remarkable** promise. He says, "Everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." He promises that God will **always** answer our prayers so we must keep praying until our prayers **are** answered. There are those occasions when there seems to be no answer to our prayer. This can **severely** test our faith. But we must put **our** timeline aside and continue to persevere with **absolute** confidence. He concludes by **reminding** us of God's goodness ... if we are good to **our** children how much **more** will God be good to us! We don't **always** pray for what is **good** for us ... we must always **trust** that God knows what we need better than we do. And after all that Jesus taught us about prayer in **this** week's Gospel reading ... I think we must take a **final** lesson from **last** week's Gospel when Mary of Bethany was sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus ... just **listening** to him. In addition to making all our petitions ... we must **always** take the time to just listen. Otherwise ... we may never **hear** God's answer.
