"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-
**giveness** 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 **suc-cumb** 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.