

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Lord's Prayer in *Luke*

This Sunday's Gospel presents the Lord's Prayer. Something is wrong, though. It's not the *Our Father* that we learned as children and that we pray during Mass. It doesn't sound quite right: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test."

Today's Gospel is the Lord's Prayer as it is found in the *Gospel of Luke*. The Our Father we learned and pray at Mass is the Lord's Prayer as it is found in the *Gospel of Matthew*.

So, why the difference? First of all, the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of Sacred Scripture, used the evangelists, the writers of the Gospels, to present the teachings of Jesus to various groups of people and to incorporate into these presentations an inspired understanding of the Lord's words. *Matthew* was addressed to Christians of Jewish origin. *Luke* was addressed to Christians of Gentile origin. *Matthew* emphasized that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scripture. Scripture was Jewish. The people Luke wrote to knew little to nothing of Jewish scripture. They may not have had a foundation in Jewish Scripture, but they did have a deep understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. They believed that the Holy Spirit called them to faith and sustained them just as he called the people of all different nations to faith on Pentecost Sunday.

The Lord's Prayer in *Luke* is given during the journey narrative. It is the prayer for the journey. In its immediate context, the disciples ask for a prayer which would express their unique following of Christ. John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the Kingdom. Did Jesus have a prayer for them? At the beginning of the Gospel they experienced Jesus at prayer. The disciples wanted to pray like He prayed. They wanted to have union with the Father, not just recite words.

After the Lord's prayer is presented, *Luke* records two parables of the Lord to demonstrate the goodness of God. The first one appears to be humorous. At least I am convinced it is meant to be humorous. A father wakes up in the middle of the night to hear a friend calling to him from outside asking him to borrow some bread. "What, are you crazy?" he calls back. "It's the middle of the night. My kids are sleeping. You wake up the baby, you put her back to sleep. My wife's sleeping, and I've got my PJ's on. Go away." "Well," Jesus says, "if the friend keeps demanding the bread, the father of the house will give it to him just to keep him quiet. If that is how a mundane father would react to a petition, how much more would Your Heavenly Father who really loves you listen to your prayers. So ask, seek, knock. God is listening." The second parable is similar. If earthly fathers know how to provide good things for their children, how much more will our Heavenly Father know what to provide for the children he loves. Then we have a phrase unique to Luke: Ask the Heavenly Father, and he will give you the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Prayer in Luke is a petition for all our needs, the greatest of which is the Holy Spirit.

Now let's go deeper into the Lord's Prayer in *Luke*. It begins by saying that God's name is hallowed. Hallow means holy. When we say Hallowed be thy name, we are saying, "May all people realized the holiness of your name." God's name was revealed to Moses from the burning bush. He said, "I am who am." The sacred name, Yahweh. The Gentiles that Luke wrote to may not have known about Moses, but they knew that a person's name was a unique expression of the whole of the person. To know a person's name is knowledge of whom the person is. May all people, may we, live in the knowledge of whom the Father is. May we recognize his uniqueness, his holiness. May his named be hallowed.

The Lord's Prayer in Luke next asks that the Father's kingdom may come. Rome had done its best to subject the entire world to its empire. It allowed the various people it conquered to keep a local government and continue local traditions, it even allowed them to continue worshiping their gods as long as they also worshiped the Roman gods, particularly the emperors. The glory that was Rome was really a materialistic and militaristic empire that kept others in place through trade and religion as well as force. When these Gentiles who had become Christians prayed, "Thy Kingdom come," they were praying that the world order be changed. They were praying for the defeat of all that Rome stood for. They were praying for a very different world which would value sacrificial love rather than the accumulation of material goods. We still need to pray for that world. We need to pray that we might take steps away from materialism and into love.

Luke goes right on to present the petition: Give us our daily bread. In the *Gospel of Luke* and in *The Acts of the Apostles*, the second book that Luke wrote, bread is always associated with prayer as a reference to the Eucharist. The prayer for daily bread in *The Gospel of Luke* is not merely a prayer for physical sustenance. It is a prayer for the Eucharist. We who come and receive communion every week can easily forget the tremendous gift we receive in our hands or on our tongues. This is Jesus, really present right here right now, nourishing us, sustaining us. We should not take this gift for granted. We pray for this gift. "Give us our daily bread."

And we ask for forgiveness as we have forgiven others. The Christian norm for forgiving is the compassion and forgiveness of the Father. The *Gospel of Luke* is often called the Gospel of God's compassion. In this Gospel Jesus instructs us to be compassionate as the Heavenly Father is compassionate. In this Gospel the Forgiving Father welcomes home the Prodigal Son. In this Gospel an Older Brother is told he must learn to overcome his resistance to forgive or this resistance itself will keep him from enjoying the Heavenly Father's banquet. In this Gospel a thief later named Dismis is told, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Finally the Lord's prayer in Luke concludes with, 'Do not subject us to the trial.' The *Gospel of Luke* often focuses in on the end of the world. It considers that as the world comes to a conclusion, many people throughout the world will have pseudo,

phoney, answers to the problems of life. We continually experience this. The girl is pregnant and some say "Have an abortion." A marriage hits a rough point and some say "Get a divorce." A teenager becomes difficult and some say, "Get out of the house." A grandparent is terminally ill and some say, "Euthanasia is the answer. It will end his pain and save the inheritance for us." These and other so called solutions of our world are part of the test, the trial the Lord gives us to see if we really want to be standing for him when the end comes, whether it be the end of the world or the end of our own personal worlds.

The Lord's Prayer in the *Gospel of Luke* is the prayer of the gentile disciple of Jesus, you and I, who recognizes that true power is not to be found in an empire and that true happiness is not to be found in possessions. The Lord's Prayer in *Luke* is ultimately a prayer to the Holy Spirit to empower us to live in the holiness of God's name, to receive worthily the Eucharist, to forgive those who hurt us and to choose God before any other solution to the problems of life.