

XVII SUNDAY (July 25) GENESIS 18:20-32, COLOSSIANS 2: 12-14, LUKE 11:1-13

Today's readings tell us what to pray and how to pray. The main themes of today's scripture are the power of intercessory prayer, the ideal prayer, the *Our Father*, and the necessity for persistence and perseverance in prayer, with trusting faith and boldness. The first reading from the book of Genesis gives us a model of intercessory prayer provided by Abraham in his dialogue with God. Although Abraham seems to be trying to manipulate God through his skillful bargaining and humble, persistent intercession, God is actually being moved to mercy by the goodness of a few innocent souls. The responsorial psalm "*Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me,*" is a hymn of hope and trust in the Lord, reminding us that God is close to the humble of heart and to all those who call upon Him in their need.

The structure of the *Our Father*: The prayer consists of two parts. In the first part, we praise and worship God and express our ardent desire for His rule in human hearts, enabling us to do His will in the most perfect way. In the second part we present our needs before God our Father with filial love and trusting faith. We offer before God our present (*daily bread*), our past (*forgiveness of sins*) and our future (*protection against temptations*). By this prayer we also invite the Trinitarian God into our lives: God the Father, the creator and provider, by asking for daily bread; God the Son, Jesus, our savior by requesting forgiveness of our sins; and God the Holy Spirit by asking for deliverance from temptations ("*the final test.*").

The petitions: They cover our present needs, the forgiveness of our past sins, and protection from future temptations. We need, not only bodily nourishment, but also daily spiritual nourishment, so that we may be strong enough to forgive those who offend us. In the next petition, Jesus links the giving and receiving of forgiveness. If we expect God to forgive us, we must forgive one another ("*Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us*"). The last petition- "*and do not subject us to the final test*"- covers future trials and temptations. We need God's protection both from the evil one (the devil) and from the evils in society that seek to destroy us. It is quite appropriate for us to pray for deliverance from evil for ourselves, our loved ones, our community, our nation, and our world.

Prayer: persistent and persevering: In the second part of today's gospel, by presenting a parable of the friend in need, Jesus emphasizes the need for persistent and persevering prayer, acknowledging our total dependence on God. In the ancient Hebrew world, hospitality was the essence of one's goodness. To welcome a visitor without food and drink was unthinkable. A traveler who was traveling in the evening to avoid the heat of the afternoon, might well arrive late at night. But the villagers used to go to bed early as they had no electricity. So in this parable, when a man received unexpected guests late at night and found his cupboard bare, he went to his neighbor and woke him in order to borrow a loaf of bread. In those days, people generally slept in one room, the

children bedded down with the adults. Rising to answer the door would disrupt the whole family and hence the neighbor was reluctant to get up. Finally, however, because of the persistence of his guest, he got up and gave bread to his neighbor. This parable does not mean that God is a reluctant giver. Rather it stresses the necessity of our persisting in prayer as the expression of our total dependence on God. Persevering in prayer helps us to purify our prayer, to make clear to ourselves our values and hopes, and to lead us to ask for what is really in our very best interests. St. Paul tells us to "*pray without ceasing*" (Romans), "*pray at all times*" (Ephesians), "*be steadfast in prayer*" (Colossians), and "*pray constantly*" (Thessalonians). Jesus assures us, "*Knock and the door shall be opened.*"

"Prayer doesn't change God; it changes me." A colleague asked C.S. Lewis if he really thought he could change God with his prayer for the cure of his wife's cancer. Lewis replied: "Prayer doesn't change God; it changes me." William McGill summed it up this way. "The value of persistent prayer is not that God will hear us but that we will finally hear God." Keep in mind that Jesus has taught us to address God as Father. A loving Father listens to his child, but does not blindly endorse every request. Instead, the loving Father provides what is needed, including discipline. Bishop Sheen has this comment on prayer: "The man who thinks only of himself says prayers of petition. He who thinks of his neighbor says prayers of intercession. He who thinks only of loving and serving God says prayers of abandonment to God's will, and that is the prayer of the saints."

Prayer is essential for Christian family life. Fidelity is one of the original blessings of married life. To be truly faithful in marriage, spouses must pray, not only individually, but together. Married couples should come together before God every day as prayer partners, thanking God and offering intercessory prayers for each other, for their children and for their dear ones. Daily prayer will help married couples to celebrate and reverence God's vision of human sexuality and honor life from conception to natural death. Here is St. John Marie Vianney's advice to a couple who asked him how to pray: "Spend three minutes praising and thanking God for all you have. Spend three minutes asking God's pardon for your sins and presenting your needs before Him. Spend three minutes reading the Bible and listening to God in silence. And do this every day."

Anecdotes

"Never give up!" Years ago in Illinois, a young man with six months schooling to his credit ran for an office in the legislature when he was 23 and was beaten. Next he entered business with a partner but failed in that too, and spent the next seventeen years paying the debts of his worthless partner. He fell in love with a charming lady and they became engaged, but she died. The next year he had a nervous breakdown. Relying on the power of prayer, he ran for the post of Speaker (at 29), of Elector (at 31) and for a seat in Congress (at 34). He was defeated each time. He then tried to obtain an appointment to the U.S. Land Office, but didn't succeed. He became a candidate for the Vice-Presidency and lost. Two years later he was defeated in an election to the Senate (at 46). He ran for office once more and was elected the sixteenth President of the United States in 1860 when he was 51. That man was **Abraham Lincoln** who put his trust in the power of persistent prayer coupled with never fading faith in God's goodness. It took Winston Churchill three years to get through the eighth grade, because he couldn't pass English! Ironically, he was asked many years later to give the commencement address at Oxford University. His famous speech consisted of only three words: "Never give up!" In today's gospel after teaching the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us that we should never give up in our prayer life.

"Could You please just touch me?" A little girl is kneeling beside her bed. She says, "Dear God, if You are there and You hear my prayer, could You please just touch me?" Just then she feels a touch. She gets so excited! She says, "Thank You, God, for touching me!" Then she looks up, sees her older sister, and gets a little suspicious. "Did you touch me?" The sister answers, "Yes, I did." "What did you do that for?" she asked." God told me to," was the reply. God touches our lives during our prayers.

JOKE OF THE WEEK.

"God is not deaf but grandma is:" Two young boys were spending the night at their rich grandma's house during Christmas. She was getting them ready for bed, and reminded them to say their prayers. Grandma left the boys alone and went into the next room before coming back to tuck them in. The older of the two said his prayers, thanking God and asking Him to bless grandma, his friends and family. Then, it was his younger brother's turn. He offered the same prayer as his big brother, but at the end of the prayer, he shouted in a very loud voice, "And God, please send me a new scooter and a CD player." His older brother turned and said, "You don't have to shout. God isn't deaf." "I know," the younger one replied. "But Grandma is."