

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel Reading *Luke 12: 1-13*

Jesus teaches the disciples about prayer.

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Luke gives more attention to Jesus' teachings on prayer than any other Gospel writer. He also mentions Jesus at prayer more than the others. In today's reading, from the beginning of Chapter 11 of his Gospel, Luke presents the core of Jesus' teaching on prayer. It consists of Jesus teaching a prayer to his disciples, a parable on the persistent neighbour, and assurances that God hears our prayers.

The disciples notice Jesus praying "in a certain place." They ask him to teach them to pray just as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. Jesus teaches them a simple version of the most famous Christian prayer, the Our Father, or the Lord's Prayer. Matthew's version shows signs of being shaped by public prayer. Luke's version is probably closer to the original form that Jesus taught. Stripped of much of the language we are used to, Luke's version seems simple and direct. We pray that God's name will be recognized as holy and that his rule over all will be established. This is followed by petitions for our needs for bread, for forgiveness, and for deliverance. Luke uses the more theological language of "sins" rather than "debts," which is used in Matthew's version.

Having taught his disciples a simple, daily prayer, Jesus goes on to reassure them that God answers prayers. First he tells a parable about a persistent neighbour who asks a friend for bread at midnight. The friend is already in bed and has no desire to disturb his family by opening the door. But because the neighbour is persistent, the sleeping man gets up and gives him all that he needs. If a neighbour is willing to help us if we are persistent enough, how

could God not respond to our requests?

This teaching concludes with the reminder that if we seek, we will get a response. If a human father, with all his faults, knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more will our heavenly Father give us? Instead of good gifts, however, Luke substitutes the word Holy Spirit. This foreshadows the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is central to Luke's theology and who will play an important role in the growth of the early Church after Pentecost.

The parable and the concluding teaching in this section should not lead us to think of prayer as a series of requests presented to God. Rather, as Jesus teaches in his model prayer, prayer consists in recognizing God's holiness and his rule over all things.

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