

July 24, 2016 – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Lord, teach us to pray."

Throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus at prayer is a model for us. In each prayerful moment, Jesus lives out the story of God's great dialogue with the human family by remaining totally open to the power of God. We must pray unceasingly, for prayer is a sign of our faith in God. Prayer is not something that we use to put pressure on God to get our own way. Authentic prayer opens us up to the action of God's Spirit, bringing us in line with God's desires, and making us into true disciples, obedient to Jesus and to the Father who has sent him. Prayer becomes one of the ways by which we follow Jesus in the Christian life.

Today's Gospel scene recounts Jesus teaching his disciples the Christian communal prayer, the "Our Father". The shorter Lucan version of the "Our Father" is presented while Jesus is at prayer and his disciples ask him to teach them to pray. His disciples watch him from afar, and are keenly aware of the intensity and intimacy of his prayer with God. Jesus responds to them by teaching them the Our Father. Jesus presents them with an example of a Christian communal prayer that stresses the fatherhood of God and acknowledges him as the one to whom the Christian disciple owes daily sustenance, forgiveness, and deliverance from the final trial.

The "Our Father" is taught to the Twelve in their role as disciples, not just as individuals to be converted but also as persons already co-responsible for the community. This prayer is an apostolic prayer, because it is said in the plural and takes for granted one's awareness of a people, of co-responsibility, of solidarity – linking each of us to the other.

When we pray "thy kingdom come," we reveal our deepest longing to see the day when the triumphant, sovereign lordship of our loving God will no longer be a mere hope clung to desperately by faith, but a manifest reality in all human affairs. Our souls can never be entirely content until God's honour is fully vindicated in all creation. These words utter a heartfelt plea: when will the reign of evil and death end?

When we beg for bread, we are really pleading for more than food. We beg the author of life for all the necessities of life: "God, give us what we need in order to enjoy the gift of life – bread for today and bread for tomorrow, to sustain us as a community."

We ask God to forgive our sins as we forgive everyone their debts to us. This may possibly reflect Luke's concern that possessions not hinder community fellowship. The final petition is most likely eschatological: do not lead us into trial: i.e. the final, great and ultimate test and agony of evil before the end.

The "Our Father" becomes the prayer of the poor, of those who plod along – weary, hungering, and struggling for faith, meaning, and strength. It is perhaps the first prayer we ever learn, and the last prayer we ever say before we close our eyes on this life.

Prayer is continual asking, seeking, knocking, but this persistence is within a parent-child relationship, which assures good gifts. Authentic prayer opens us up to the action of God's Spirit, bringing us in line with God's desires, and making us into true disciples, obedient to Jesus and to the Father who has sent him.



[Fr. Thomas Rosica, shortened from: <http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/category/rosicareflections>]