

17th Sunday C (Luke 11:1-13)

As we recall the times we have read the Gospels, we become aware that the only thing the disciples ever specifically asked Jesus to teach them was how to pray. This seemed a strange request coming from people who were born and raised under the influence of a great religion. They were Jews, all of them. Behind them lay the rich heritage of the prophets. None of them was a stranger to the idea or experience of prayer. They had probably prayed from the time they were little kids.

Then they came under the influence of Jesus, and they began to see what prayer meant in his life, that it was more than a formality and was rather a source of strength and power. He went into it in one mood and came out in another. Observing this, the disciples began to understand that they didn't really know how to pray at all. There came a day when they waited until Jesus had finished praying, and one of them said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."

When Jesus prayed, instead of begging a reluctant, remote, impersonal deity, he was talking with a loving Father. "If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" All through his life, the message runs, God is Father, we are God's children. It is totally relational. This parental relationship with a heavenly Father may be easier for some of us than others. Father, for many of us, is a happy word. It conjures up memories of a strong and trusted friend, one to whom we could turn with all our needs and problems. But unfortunately, for some people the word Father doesn't carry that kind of meaning, because they never had that kind of father. For some, the concept of God as Mother as a parental image may be more acceptable and appropriate. Holy Scripture supports this concept, for In Isaiah 19:15 we read: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb. Even if she forgets, I will never forget you."

If God is my father or Mother, then that makes all of us brothers and sisters. God not only cares about me, God also cares about you. True prayer can never be an exercise in selfishness. The whole family must be considered. Notice that Jesus always uses plural pronouns. "Give **us** each day our daily bread. Forgive **us** our sins, as **we** forgive all who do **us** wrong." Authentic prayer always has a social dimension. We belong to a large family. This kind of prayer raises our consciousness that our call is always to be aware of the needs of our brothers and sisters as we pray and work for the growth of that kingdom, the kingdom of peace, justice, joy, and love. We gather to give thanks for the life giving presence of Jesus who feeds us with his very self as the deepest kind of intimate prayer.

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