

Seventeenth Sunday Ordinary Time

In the Gospels, especially in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the authors have certain themes. There is the theme of discipleship, renouncing possessions, prayer, and more. The theme of the Gospel reading today is one of prayer (see Lk 11:1-13). In fact, the disciples of Jesus ask Him to teach them how to pray as John taught his disciples to pray. John the Baptist must have been quite a popular person. He obviously had a large following. Otherwise, why would the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray as John the Baptist prayed? You would think that they would just ask Jesus how to pray. After all, John the Baptist admitted that he was not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus.

Jesus teaches His disciples what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer. However, Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is slightly different from Matthew's version. The version of the Lord's Prayer that everyone is familiar with is the one from Matthew, not Luke. Luke's version is shorter, and leaves out a couple of things that Matthew has in his version. Luke leaves out "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven", and also, "deliver us from evil."

A few months ago, Pope Francis stirred up some controversy about the Lord's Prayer. He mentioned that he thought the line "lead us not into temptation" was misleading. He said that our heavenly Father would never lead us into temptation. And so, the wording of this line should be changed. Some Bishops in different languages have changed the language of that line to reflect what the Pope had suggested.

Other Bishops and some Scripture scholars have commented on this issue. They do not want the line in the Lord's Prayer to be changed. Some of them mentioned that the Greek word for temptation could also mean trial. So the original meaning in Greek could also mean "do not lead us into trials." If we look at it this way, then it makes more sense why the line is stated the way it is. God does allow us to face trials in our lives. Why does God allow us to undergo trials? When we face trials in our lives we grow in strength. We learn to face difficulties rather than run away from them. We can become better and holier people by facing these trials with a positive attitude. When we face these trials we are also asking God to help us to avoid giving in to temptation and sinning because of the struggles that we are undergoing. We can be tempted to take shortcuts in order to get out of a trial. These shortcuts may be sinful in nature. So, in trying to avoid a trial we may actually be walking right into something that is sinful. When we face the trial rather than avoid it we also learn to trust in God's help, and grow in our faith.

Have you ever seen parents that coddle their child and don't allow their child to figure anything out for his or herself? The parents are always there to the rescue. The parents will always answer for the child and defend the child under any circumstances, no matter how major or minor the situation. The child never really learns how to take care of himself or herself because mom and dad always takes care of everything. The child will always subconsciously be dependent on mom and dad to take care of things. The child never really gets a chance to grow up.

So, God allows us to face trials to help us grow up, to become stronger, to learn to avoid temptation, and to use the gifts that He has given us to succeed in life. Facing trials in our lives should also help us grow in our prayer life. This is another aspect of the Gospel reading today. Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray, then He teaches them to be persistent in prayer. Jesus gives us the example of the man who came to his friend's house at midnight looking for some bread. The man was persistent and wouldn't give up until he got what he was looking for. Like the spoiled child that gets whatever he or she wants, does God give us whatever we ask for, as long as we persist in asking? The short answer is "no". God gives us the Holy Spirit, according to what we heard in our Gospel reading today. An abundance of the Holy Spirit will help us grow in holiness and in strength to endure whatever trials may come our way.

We do have an example of how to pray with persistence in our first reading today (see Gen 18:20-32). Abraham is humbly pleading with the Lord to spare the lives of the people of Sodom. Abraham is persistent and keeps bargaining with the Lord. Abraham says, “though I am but dust and ashes”, and “Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on.” Abraham keeps pleading with the Lord to lower the number of innocent people in Sodom so that He will not destroy the city. Abraham’s humble persistence is successful in getting the Lord to agree to lower the number of innocent people to ten. We know the outcome of the story though. Unfortunately, there were not even ten innocent people to be found in the entire city. However, the lesson for us is to be humble before the Lord and to be persistent in prayer.

As we heard in the responsorial psalm, “I will give you thanks, O Lord, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth; . . . When I called you answered me; you built up strength within me.” We give you thanks, O Lord, for the abundance of life that you give us through Christ our Lord. Amen.