

## **17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time C/2007**

All the religions throughout the world lift their voice to God in prayer. We too, as Christians, pray and offer to God our petitions as well as our thanksgiving. But what is prayer? What is its purpose? Why shall we pray? How shall we pray?

Today's readings try to answer these questions by teaching us the true spirit of prayer offered to God, and by showing us the right way to address God in our prayers.

In the first reading, Abraham is confronted with the imminence of God's judgment and punishment over Sodom and Gomorrah, and pleads with him in favor of the sinful cities. The text presents us with a kind of bargain in which Abraham touches the compassionate and merciful heart of God, and eventually brings him to refrain from punishing.

What is important in this text is the fact that God is sensitive to human plea and prayer. He is touched by the human cry as well as he is offended by human sin. But where sins abound, there his compassion and mercy overflow in abundance. Compassion and mercy are permanent attitudes of God. Compassion and mercy go beyond the law and its punitive justice. That is why God always gives a second chance and forgives our sins.

To forgive our sins does not mean that God does not see our bad deeds. What he wants is only that we get out of our sinful situation, repent and be saved. If we miss the opportunity we can take it out only on ourselves.

God's forgiveness has been granted to us through the death and the resurrection of Jesus, says St Paul. By dying on the cross, Jesus has wiped away all our transgressions and brought us to life with him. In this sense, through baptism we have become the members of his body, and his brothers and sisters. Like him, we pray to God; like him we call God Father.

All that brings us to the importance of the prayer of "Our Father" Jesus taught his disciples and us alike. First of all, the fact that Jesus prays is already an invitation to us that we have to pray any time and in any circumstances. By praying we remain united with Jesus and his Father. In praying, we thank God and praise him for the gift of life as well as we present to him our joys, our needs and our trials. That is the content of the prayer of "Our Father".

The first part of the prayer deals with the glory of God, and the second with human needs. It is only when God receives the honor and place that are due to him in our life that our human necessities can be addressed in the right order. For that, our prayer must never be an attempt to bend the will of God to our desires, but rather a submission of our wills to the will of God. That is why our prayer must seek first and always the fulfillment of God's plan and the glory of his name.

By praying in the spirit of Jesus, we have the assurance that we will be heard because it is the will of Our Father to sustain us in life, to forgive us our sins and

to keep us from stumbling. The prayer of “Our Father” covers the whole range of human life, that is, the past, the present and the future.

The petition for bread deals with our life in the present; the petition for forgiveness deals with our past, and the petition for the help in temptation has to do with the future. The request for bread recognizes the providence of God upon us as the one who sustains us in the present life and provides for our needs. The request for forgiveness brings all the happenings of our past life in the presence of God so that we may be forgiven, purified and strengthened by turning the page of the past for a new life with Christ. The request for help in temptation is about our faithfulness in our commitments; it puts the unknown of our future into God’s hands. It reminds us that we need God in order to be strong and able to triumph over the eventual temptations of evil. In all these petitions, Jesus teaches us to lay the whole of our life, past, present and the future, before the grace of God.

As a word of conclusion, let me bring some points of meditation to our attention. First. Through the attitude of Abraham, we learn that each of us, in particular, is a mediator of his brothers and sisters before God. We often forget in daily life this role of mediator. We have to take seriously when someone asks for our prayers as well as the bad situation of our fellows and offer it before the Lord in prayer. The pray of the just conveys God’s grace and pleases God. Our faithfulness to God and all our effort to remain righteous can save the lives of many. Do not give up to do good and to remain faithful in your faith.

Second. The fact that God has renounced to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah is a sign that God’s mercy goes beyond our sins. However, his mercy challenges us to change and to repent. God is patient with us in order to give us the time to repent.

Third. Abraham obtained a positive answer to his petition because of his persistence. This episode teaches that God always answers our prayer. The problem, however, is how to come to recognize the answer he gives to our request. The assurance that God answers our prayer is in his faithfulness toward us and his veracity. If a friend can wake up in the middle of the night to help a bothering friend, why should not God do the same? If a father or a mother cannot give to his child a snake instead of fish, or a scorpion instead of omelet, why should not God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? It does not mean that we should do nothing, because God knows our needs. On the contrary, we have to ask, to search and to knock at the door. Our perseverance is of great price. We do our part and let God do his. Life improves not for the desperate and the resigned, but for those who use prayer and action together. May the Lord lead each one of us to understand that life should be addressed with faith, hope, and perseverance to meet its challenges! God bless you all.



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**Genesis 18, 20-32; Colossians 2, 12-14; Luke 11, 1-13**