

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of prayer. They show us the way we have to address God, which words we have to use and the result that comes out of a sincere prayer presented to God. They also invite us to open up to God in prayer with perseverance and persistence.

The first reading describes the prayer of Abraham before God. It shows how, while the sinful situation of Sodom and Gomorrah was critical to their survival, Abraham pleaded with God in order to save the life of innocent people. It also shows how, thanks to the prayerful pleading of Abraham, God relented and refused to destroy those cities, and he preserved them.

What is behind this text is first of all the idea that God is affected and offended by human sin. There is also the idea that God is compassionate, forgiving and attentive to the prayer of the just. The last idea is related to the truth that God's bounty and mercy are bigger than human sin.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel in which Jesus is talking about the outcome of persisting prayer. First of all, the Gospel relates the case of Jesus' prayer in one location, when one of his disciples requested him to teach them how to pray.

Then, the Gospel reports on the prayer of "Our Father" that for the first time, Jesus taught his disciples. After that, it relates the words of Jesus over a man who woke up late in the night to give bread to a friend, thanks to his persistence.

The Gospel speaks also of the assurance that Jesus gave his disciples about prayer, namely that whoever asks will receive, whoever seeks finds and whoever knocks the door will be opened to him.

The Gospel ends up reporting again the words of Jesus in which he contrasts the infinite bounty of God and the finite goodness of human beings.

What do we learn from these readings? Today I want to talk about the power of prayer. In fact, we are all used to addressing God in our prayers. Whatever might be the way we do it or its content, our prayer is an expression of our relationship with God, of our state and of our situation before him.

The fact that Jesus was continually in prayer with his Father and was the first to teach his disciples how to pray is an indication that prayer is important and beneficial to us. If that is true, then, it means that Our Father who is in heaven is open to us and ready to answer whenever we call upon him. For that reason, it is important that we pray any time and in any circumstance of life.

When we pray, we enter into union with Jesus, with his Father and with the Holy Spirit. We pray to God for the glory of his name; we pray to him in thanksgiving for the gift of life and for all the blessings he has bestowed upon us. We pray to him in our needs, and our expectations, in our joys and our trials. All those instances are summarized in the prayer of the "Our Father" that Jesus taught his disciples.

The prayer of the Our Father covers the whole range of our life by referring to our past, our present and our future. For instance, the petition for bread is about the providence

of God upon us as he provides for our needs. The request for forgiveness is about our past so that we might be forgiven for our wrongdoings and the help in temptation is about faithfulness in our commitments so that the unknown of our future remains in God's hands.

The spirit that has to guide us in our prayer should always be trust in God and his promise. That is why when we pray we have to be sure of obtaining what we are asking for. In fact, 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 us what we ask of him?

It does not mean, however, 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 important. We do our part and we let God do his. The example of Abraham should be always in mind: how a prayer done with sincerity and humility can be so powerful that it touches the heart of God. That is the way we have to pray, not as though prayer was magic, but by combining prayer and action.

However, our prayer must never be an attempt to bend the will of God to our desires, but rather a submission of our wills to his. For that reason, we have to distinguish God's calendar from human calendar, God's timing from human timing, God's plan from our plans.

For instance, when we pray, we want things to be fixed right away, according to our plan, however it might not be the same in God's vision, because for him one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day (Ps 90: 4; 2 Peter 3: 8).

When we pray, we have to always acknowledge that we pray to God, but we are also mediators for one another. Like Abraham who intervened in favor of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, we have to pray for one another even when people do not ask of us. We should never forget that the prayer of the just person conveys God's grace and pleases God. Our faithfulness to God and prayer can save the lives of many.

The fact that God renounced (refused) to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah is a sign that his mercy goes beyond human sins. This is a message of hope for all those who live in fear for what they have done in their past. However, the more God forgives us, the more he challenges us to repent. He is patient with us in order to give us the time to change.

Let us open up this week to God in our prayer with trust and confidence. Let us pray for one another with eagerness. May the Lord himself lead us to understand that life should be addressed with faith, hope, and perseverance in order to meet its challenges! God bless you all.

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



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