

17th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”
July 27-28, 2013

The infinite value of the Lord’s Prayer

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

On a bit of a whim, a priest friend and I went out for a scoop of ice cream on Grand Ave. The lines were so long, it was not until the last minute that I was able to see the flavors. By then I was asked to make my choice, without benefit of any time. I blurted out a flavor, only to change my mind in the nick of time. Then I changed it again and asked for ½ a scoop of two different flavors. The smile on the face of the worker behind the counter indicated that I was not the first to be so indecisive, nor would I be the last. What is your favorite flavor of ice cream? It is a difficult question.

Today I ask you, “What is your favorite prayer?” For many, the answer is the Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father. And for good reason. In today’s Gospel, we find ourselves with one version of the Lord’s Prayer, somewhat different than the more familiar version of St. Matthew. Since Jesus taught this prayer to His disciples, it stands to reason that he should have repeated it more than once. The longer version in St. Matthew was that which the Church adopted from the beginning for the sacred liturgy.

The Lord’s Prayer establishes a true spiritual friendship with God. When we draw close to Him, we are able to develop a relationship that endures through the joys and struggles of life. It is important to have both a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as well as a relationship within His Church.

We call God *Our* Father, because we see a deeper relationship than one only between God and ourselves. We are part of a larger whole. The fact that we do **not** say, “My Father,” should remind us of the communal nature of our faith, and our new relationship with Him; we have become “his” people and he is henceforth “our” God.¹

Even when we pray alone, we do so as one of God’s children, and never

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2787.

apart from the realization that we form part of God's family, created to love and serve Him. So too with our prayers, whether we pray collectively in our families, or quietly in our room. We do so as a member of the Body of Christ.

"Give us each day our daily bread." St. Matthew's "this day" is replaced with St. Luke's "**each** day," which in Greek is the equivalent of "day after day," expressing more clearly the sense of continuation. We need our daily bread, not only for today, but every day. The use of "daily" (*epi-ousios*) by St. Luke is the only time that this word is used in the New Testament. "Taken literally, it refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ, the 'medicine of immortality,' without which we have no life within us."² We must recognize our continual need of conversion. If we think we have finally arrived, we may be certain that in fact we have taken a wrong turn, just as did the Pope's driver in Rio di Janeiro!

"Do not subject us to the final test." Though not as familiar as St. Matthew's, "lead us not into temptation," it bears special mention. The 4th century monastic writer by the name of St. John Cassian delighted in the Lord's Prayer, in part he wrote, because it included no requests for riches, no allusion to honors, no demand for power or strength; it was directed towards heavenly matters. Regarding trials he wrote:

Therefore, the words "Subject us not to the trial" do not mean: Do not allow us ever to be tried, but rather: Do not allow us to be overcome when we are tried...For if we pray not to be allowed to be tried, how will the strength of our steadfastness be tested, according to the words: 'Whoever has not been tried has not been proven?'"³ (emphasis added)

As much as we may like to avoid trials, I humbly suggest we take the advice of the wisdom of the ages. We ought **not** to pray for a life without temptation, for even the Lord was tempted, and if we overcome

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2837.

³ St. John Cassian (trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P.), "The Conferences," 9. XXIII.1. (New York: Newman Press, 1997), pp. 343 - 345.

temptation, we will be more Christ-like. God does not want to impose the good, but desires for us to freely to embrace Him. Good parents want the same for their children.

Ultimately, we must act in freedom, even if for a time our parents act in a manner that rightly prevents us from making certain decisions that are beyond us. They guide and protect us, but when we reach maturity, those decisions must be ours and they must also be free. The good must be freely chosen.

While temptation is not ‘good’ in itself, there is however a certain degree of *usefulness* to temptation.⁴ It teaches us to know ourselves and our weaknesses. God is faithful and He does not tempt us beyond our strength, and for every trial that comes our way he will provide a way out. The way out often requires repentance and the firm purpose of amendment required to fully receive His grace. But it will be given to those who seek it.

The Lord’s Prayer is rightly considered to be the best and greatest prayer, and for good reason. It is all there. It is challenging even as it is comforting. The Our Father is our most complete and surest defense against a host of spiritual enemies, and against all who would try to keep us from the Father’s loving embrace. In the Lord’s Prayer, we find the summary of the whole Gospel and the most perfect of all prayers.

⁴ Cf. Origen, *De orat.* 29 quoted in CCC, para. # 2847: “God does not want to impose the good, but wants free beings. . . . There is a certain usefulness to temptation. No one but God knows what our soul has received from him, not even we ourselves. But temptation reveals it in order to teach us to know ourselves, and in this way we discover our evil inclinations and are obliged to give thanks for the goods that temptation has revealed to us.”