

GOSPEL

LUKE 11:1-13

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'Say this when you pray:

"Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us.

And do not put us to the test."

He also said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him"; and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you." I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants.

'So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. what father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In today's Gospel passage, Saint Luke narrates the circumstances in which Jesus teaches the "Lord's Prayer". They, the disciples, already know how to pray by reciting the formulas of the Jewish tradition, but they too wish to experience the same "quality" of Jesus' prayer because they can confirm that prayer is an essential dimension in their Master's life. Indeed each of his important actions is marked by long pauses in prayer. Moreover, they are fascinated because they see that he does not pray like the other teachers of the time, but rather his prayer is an intimate bond with the Father, so much so that they wish

to be a part of these moments of union with God, in order to completely savour its sweetness.

Thus, one day they wait for Jesus to finish praying in a secluded place and then they ask him: "Lord, teach us to pray". In responding to the disciples' explicit question, Jesus does not provide an abstract definition of prayer, nor does he teach an efficient technique to pray in order to "obtain" something. Instead, he invites his own to experience prayer, by putting them directly in communication with the Father, causing them to feel nostalgic for a personal relationship with God, with the Father. Herein lies the novelty of Christian prayer! It is a dialogue between people who love each other, a dialogue based on trust, sustained by listening and open to a commitment to solidarity. It is the dialogue of a Son with his Father, a dialogue between children and their Father. This is Christian prayer.

Hence, he delivers the "Lord's Prayer" to them, perhaps the most precious gift left to us by the Divine Master during his earthly mission. After revealing to us his mystery as Son and brother, with that prayer Jesus allows us to enter into God's paternity. I want to underscore this: when Jesus teaches us the "Our Father", he allows us to enter into God's paternity and he points the way to enter into a prayerful and direct dialogue with him, through the path of filial intimacy. It is a dialogue between a father and his son, of a son with his father. What we ask in the "Our Father" is already fulfilled for us in his Only-begotten Son: the sanctification of the Name, the advent of the Kingdom, the gift of bread, of forgiveness and of delivery from evil. As we ask, we open our hand to receive; to receive the gifts that the Father has shown us in his Son. The prayer that the Lord taught us is the synthesis of every prayer and we address it to the Father, always in communion with our brothers and sisters. Sometimes distractions can occur in prayer, but we often feel the need to stop at the first word, "Father", and feel that paternity in our heart.

Jesus then recounts the parable of the importune friend and Jesus says: "we must persevere in prayer". My thoughts turn to what children do when they are three-and-a-half years old: they begin to ask about things they do not understand. In my country, it is called "the 'why' age", I think it is also the same here. Children begin to look at their father and ask: Why Dad? Why Dad? They ask for explanations. Let us be

careful: when the father begins to explain why, they come up with another question without listening to the entire explanation. What is happening? Children feel insecure about many things that they are only partially beginning to understand. They only wish to attract the father's gaze, and thus the "why, why, why?". If we pause on the first word of the "Our Father", we will be doing the same as when we were children: attracting the father's gaze upon us: saying, "Father, Father" and also asking, "why?", and he will look at us.

Let us ask Mary, woman of prayer to help us pray the "Our Father" in unity with Jesus in order to live the Gospel guided by the Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Spend some time reflecting and sharing on each line of Luke's version of the Our Father. In what ways does each line affirm and challenge how you live, act and respond to God?
- The last two paragraphs of this passage focus on trusting God to answer prayer. What has your experience been of God answering prayers? In what ways have you found Jesus' promise in the last line of the passage to be true?

PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.