

July 24, 2022
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Genesis 18:20-32
Psalms 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8
Colossians 2:12-14
Luke 11:1-13

During last week's homily we heard the words, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

So then, what was the better part Mary had chosen? St Paul explains what the better part is in his letter to the Colossians, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

We then concluded our discussion with the idea that Mary discovered the essence of what it means to abide in Christ. Here we might define abiding as a "purposed relationship." What do we mean by a purposed relationship? A purposed relationship is a relationship where both parties choose to spend time together. For example, spending time with the Lord, listening to what He says, and then doing what makes Him happy.

Thus, the Gospel reading today follows a similar theme of purposed and prayerful relationship. Today however, the emphasis switches from Mary and Martha - to you and me. Hence, the message from today's Psalm sets the stage for this morning's discussion.

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart for you have heard the words of my mouth; in the presence of angels, I will sing your praise; I will worship at your holy temple and give thanks to your name, (Psalm 138:1-2).

Digging deeper, did you hear what the Psalmist said? He said, “In the presence of angels, I will sing your praise; I will worship at your holy temple and give thanks to your name.”

In the OT the Psalmist corporately worshipped God in the Temple liturgy. Where do we corporately worship God? We worship God in the Divine Liturgy. Here we must realize that the center point of our New Testament worship is indeed the Eucharist.

Whereas in the Old Testament, the center point of Temple worship was the sacrificial lamb. The sacrificed Temple lamb prefigured Jesus Christ and it was to be eaten. In the NT Jesus, who is the sacrificial lamb, and by His instruction is consumed along with all those in Heaven in the Eucharistic rite – “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

As we read the Gospel account, we witness the disciples observing the Lord as He prayed - and then they asked, “Lord, will you teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples?” Here we can only assume that something about Jesus’ prayer habits must have caught the attention of the disciples.

Apparently, they could see and/or feel something different about Him. Something about Jesus’ prayer life intrigued the disciples and they too wanted to experience it. Think about it, how and why did He spend so much time in prayer?

May I submit a plausible answer is that when Jesus prayed, He was caught up into heaven. (Scripture mentions that St Paul was caught up into the third heaven.) Even though Jesus was physically here on earth, He was at the same time in the spirit back home with His

Father in Heaven. Consequently, the disciples said, Lord, teach *us* to pray.

So, what did the Lord say to them? Did He say, ok folks, you need to only pray in the spirit; or pray whatever comes to mind, and/or pray formally, and just go with substance? He certainly did not say, "Only pray the words written in red in your Bible."

I hope you know that I am being very facetious, but I must say that one time I heard a youth evangelist give his audience that very same instructions as a way they were to pray.

Now I have little doubt that many of the teachers of prayer are very sincere in their beliefs and teachings, but we must ask, what did Jesus teach when asked by the disciples, "Lord teach us to pray?"

First, regarding the "how to" pray - in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus said,

"But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Now more specific to the point of what to say is written by St Luke and here we will quote the Aramaic Bible in Plain English.

Yeshua said to them, "When you pray, you shall say thus: Our Father, who are in Heaven, 'Hallowed be your name, let your Kingdom come, let your will be done also in the earth as

it is in Heaven. Give us our necessary bread every day and forgive us our sins even as we forgive all who are indebted to us, and do not lead us into temptation, but save us from the Evil One, (or as some translations state "final test.")

Here some will immediately notice a much shorter version of the Lord's Prayer than they are accustomed to. So why is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer shorter than Matthew's? The answer is unknown; but biblical scholars agree that the core essential components of the prayer are pretty much the same.

Suggesting that The Lord's Prayer has two basic parts, the first part begins with proper praise being directed to whom and to where they are. Our Heavenly Father, i.e., "hallowed is His name." You will notice that at the start there is nothing that suggests our own personal importance or our wants or needs. Prayer's genesis is not about us, it is about Him. Hence prayer starts out by establishing a righteous relational order. God our Father is supreme, hallowed or holy is His name, and He is in located in Heaven.

There is so much more we could say here, but I think we have established the fact that Jesus was adamant that our hearts and prayers must be directed towards His Father in Heaven. Likewise, the Divine Liturgy, like the words of the Psalmist directs our attention to the egis of Heaven.

The second part of the Lord's Prayer concerns our daily needs. So, what is it that we need? First, and foremost we must set our priorities in order. More than anything else in the world we need our sins forgiven. That's right, we need our sins forgiven and to accomplish that we need our daily bread.

Jesus said, “*Take this all of you, and eat, of it, for this is My Body, which will be given up for you.*” And then He said regarding the chalice, “*Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of My Blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and many for the forgiveness of sins.*”

Here some may question, I thought He forgave all our sin when we “got saved”? Yes and no, I think it more reasonable to say that He forgave all our sins when He died on Calvary and was risen from the dead. But most of us continue to sin each day in one form or other, and unfortunately sometimes it can be a rather deliberate act.

Hence the reason St John reassures us in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This promise also helps us to understand why St James reminds us to “Confess our faults one to another so that you might be healed or restored” (James 5:16). The fact is we sin every day, and any sin no matter how small needs to be dealt with.

Let’s go back for a moment to the phrase, “Give us our daily bread.” In his book, *The Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* author and scholar Brent Pitre states,

The word [used here] for daily [as in give us our daily bread] the word daily is *epiousios* which means (it’s rather a hard word to translate) super-substantial or supernatural. It’s a kind of miraculous bread, [certainly] no ordinary bread. Give us this day our *epiousios* bread, which the early Church Fathers, from the beginning, interpreted as a reference to the manna, the new manna of the kingdom of God, the Eucharist, the daily bread of the new covenant.

So, it's the bread of the kingdom of God, which the early Church identified with the Eucharist. So, the first thing Jesus asked his disciples to pray for is this mysterious *epiousios* bread of the kingdom, because that's the bread they really need.

Think about it for a moment, Dr Pitre's insights are indeed very interesting, and if his statement is true, (and I believe it is, he is an excellent scholar) then he is suggesting a life changing perspective when it comes to understanding the Lord's Prayer.

For years I have always believed that Jesus was simply talking about our basic daily needs, food, water, and shelter, the bottom rung on Abraham Maslow's basic needs chart.

But not so, if His prayer was just about our basic human needs then Jesus would really be no different than any other great humanitarian teacher who abdicated for the equality of all human dignity and welfare. But Jesus is different. He instructed the disciples to first pray for the future and the new heavenly manna every devout Jew expected to return once again.

So, when considering the Eucharist - the Lord's Prayer takes on a whole new meaning. Our Father in Heaven gave us the Body and Blood of His dearly beloved Son so that our sins will be forgiven. Indeed, and again, historical scholarship agrees that the Eucharist is the center point of our Christian worship, Jesus Christ the focus.

Only in receiving the Eucharist do you and I receive a gift so great as to be sacramentally made one with God in Christ Jesus. And thus, we are taught to pray, Father give us our daily bread, give us your Son who makes it possible that our sins are forgiven, our

bodies healed, and the grace to behold the gift of eternal life with you forever in heaven.

Each time we are gathered by God together to pray, confess our sins, hear the word of God, and receive the Blessed Sacrament, our Father in Heaven purposefully and most uniquely fulfills our prayerful request to give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.

Indeed, it is truly an amazing mystery, a mystery that can only be experienced at a Eucharistic altar where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated as a perpetual once offered sacrifice in His Holy Presence.

I'm thinking that from this day forward every time you or I pray the Lord's prayer it will never be the same; indeed, I'm praying that it will begin to take on a whole new meaning. Lord, give us our daily bread. Lord, give us the Eucharist. Give us your most precious body and blood to eat because we need the forgiveness of sin, we need your divine healing, and we need you to not subject us to the final test.

So, you might ask what is the final test Luke mentions? Jesus did not explain what the final test was, or what it might be in the future. However, at the time of Luke's writing Jewish scholars believed that in the last days there would be a season of great woes before the Messiah appeared, or in the case of the Christian - before He returned. Unfortunately, they were already being asked to literally give their lives for the testimony of Christ.

So, in closing we learned that the essence of today's lesson concerns the necessity of being persistent and steadfast in asking

for God's Presence. Jesus talked to the disciples regarding how and what to pray for. The disciples asked Jesus how to pray and he taught them. When you pray, and their at least two types of prayer – corporate and private, first check your attitude – you are speaking to Our Father in Heaven. Jesus then gave the Early Church a Eucharistic model to follow. Indeed, a model they would never forget, yet a model they could follow each time they were gathered for the prayers.

It is speculated by many historical scholars that *The Didache*, which outlines an early Jewish corporate liturgy, may have been written before the Gospel of Matthew. Thus, when you pray, pray persistently for supernatural food; indeed, pray for the food that second century Ignatius called the “medicine of immortality.”

Indeed, the Lord's Prayer will never again be the same, when we understand it in the context of the Eucharist. Each time we pass the peace, pray together, and receive the Blessed Sacrament, let us give Him thanks for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of Eternal life.

Indeed, we proclaim your death, O lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.