

**THE SEVENTEENTH (17<sup>TH</sup>) SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
YEAR C**

**REGARDING PETITIONARY PRAYER**

Have you ever wondered why the Lord's disciples found it necessary to ask Jesus to teach them how to pray? I mean ... after all ... the Jewish people have to be considered maybe the greatest "pray-ers" of all-time! They gave the world the Psalms! Their liturgical prayer life was rich and codified. The Jewish people prayed both communally and privately, individually. The Scriptures abound with examples of Jewish men and women uttering beautiful personal hymns of praise to God: our Blessed Mother's "Magnificat" (Lk 1:46-55) is only one such that comes readily to mind. Indeed, when it is all said and done, it even has to be admitted that it was the Jews who taught Christians how to pray!

The *Lord's Prayer* is a multi-layered, a deeply theological and intimate prayer. Saints and many other people of varying stature and authority have been commenting on the *Our Father* for hundreds and hundreds of years. I can do no better than they have, and don't intend to try to do justice today to the fullness of the prayer, yet I will speak to an aspect of it: namely, its **petitionary** dimension.

In Luke's rendering the *Lord's Prayer* is much shorter than Matthew's version (Mt 6:9-13), which is the one we routinely recite. Still, even in its abbreviated form, there is a major element of petition. "Father, give us each day our daily bread. Father, forgive us our sins. Father, do not subject us to the final test" (Lk 11:3,4a, 4c).

A lot of people probably have a measure of ambivalence toward petitionary prayers, are not really sure about it. We can be hesitant, untrusting, doubtful about that enterprise. After all, we have all prayed and prayed for God's help and for miracles only to have – time and time again –

been disappointed, seemingly unheard. At other times we remember certain related words Jesus spoke, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mt 6:8b).

Nonetheless, we continue to petition God anyway. Indeed, in today’s Gospel excerpt, Jesus specifically instructs the disciples to persist in petitionary prayer, to be faithful to it. Storm heaven with petitionary prayers. (Lk 11:5-13). The Lord tells us and wants us – in the words of St. Paul – to “[p]ray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17).

Why should we do this? Though God already knows what we need before we ask, does he just like to be asked? Can prayer “change God’s mind”, and if it can, does that inspire me with much confidence in a god who can be influenced by mere mortals? What do we think when our prayers go unanswered? On those occasions, it is small consolation and no satisfaction to think that God had other plans or that he answered our prayers differently, perhaps in a way we don’t recognize. Regardless, we ask: over and over. Maybe in petition we intuit something authentic about our relationship with, and in, God.

What we intuit is this: God speaks only one word. And that Word is *Son*. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). God’s single, Eternal Word is the complete expression of who God is and of what his plans are. Everything else that comes from God is an echo, a resonance, of the One Word. You and I exist only because God sees us when he sees Christ, said “yes” to our existences when he said “Yes” to Himself. Our names are a distant echo of God having uttered, “Son.” What God grants is granted because it has life in Christ and was granted, was answered when God said “Son” and our names were first echoed there.

So, if we petition God for something that accords with his Only Spoken Word, we get it. Otherwise we don’t. The fact is, unanswered prayers go unanswered because they have no

existence. Just because we can utter something, just because we can speak, does not mean our words have substance or are capable of bringing anything to pass. Only God's Word is effecting.

When we petition God, we are actually – whether we know it or not – asking to hear our own names echo in the Original Word. We are petitioning to discover our being in Being Itself.

Be persistent and diligent in petitioning God, not to be heard, so much as to find your self in God's Only Uttered Answer.

Readings:

Gen 18:20-32.

Ps 138:1-3, 6-8.

Col 2:12-14.

Lk 11:1-13.

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