

Fr. Thomas Esposito, O.Cist.
17th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year C
Cistercian Abbey - July 28, 2013
Readings: Gn 18:20-32; Ps 138; Col 2:12-14; Lk 11:1-13

The first words in today's Gospel have a familiar ring to them- but they also leave us a bit confused. The response Jesus offers to the disciples' desire to learn how to pray sounds much like the Our Father- but some words, you surely noticed, are missing. For instance, the "Our Father" prayer as Luke has written it down in his Gospel is missing the "Our"! You may be surprised to learn that two versions of the prayer we all know by heart exist: the one we just listened to from Luke, and the one we normally pray, which is found in Matthew's Gospel. No one knows why two versions have been passed down by the evangelists- perhaps Luke has an earlier edition of the prayer, or maybe Jesus recited this prayer multiple times during his ministry and in different ways. The answer will probably elude us until we get the chance to ask Jesus Himself- rather than omnipotent biblical scholars- what He *really* said!

It is good for us to listen to Luke's shorter version of the prayer today. So often when we say the "Our Father", the words spill out almost automatically as we become something like pious zombies, allowing our memory to do the recitation work while our minds flitter and flutter elsewhere. The Lord's prayer, recited at every Mass, is so routine to us that our mental cruise control takes over almost naturally, and we devote as much attention to the words we are supposedly praying as we do when someone asks us, "How are you?" at the supermarket cash register. The question itself is thrown out into the void, usually without any care for a thoughtful response; and without a split-second of reflection, "Fine" or "Good" will tumble off our tongue, as if we were playing a mindless language game, fulfilling social proprieties with the obligatory courteous password before we can move on to paying for our groceries.

It should not be so with any prayer, let alone the prayer which Jesus specifically taught his disciples to pray when asked. If we were at all aware of the infinite riches of God's mystery bundled up in the words of the Our Father, we would beg the Lord for the grace to mean what we pray, and pray what we mean. Perhaps reflecting on *why* Jesus tells us to pray in this way will motivate us to pray it with our heart rather than our head. Jesus instructs us to address God as *Father*. It rarely occurs to us to ponder how extraordinarily blessed we are to be able to call God by this name. God, the omnipotent, almighty, sovereign Lord and ruler of the universe, creator of the earth and sea and stars- wants us to call Him *Father* as a way of comprehending His

relationship with us. Our God is not some cosmic clockmaker up in the sky, or a deadbeat Dad so far removed from us that the affairs of his mortal children fail to interest Him in the least. No-God loves us as children, calls us His children, and begs us to love Him as a Father and to depend on Him as children depend on their earthly fathers.

At times He may seem like an annoying Dad who gives His rebellious teenagers an early curfew; but when we sin, He is always willing, always *yearning*, for us to ask for His forgiveness. And Jesus, who is *the* Son of God and thus our brother, gives us his own example of how to talk to our Father: during his agony in the garden, Jesus calls Him *Abba*, an Aramaic word best translated as "Daddy". St. Paul uses the same word, *Abba*, Father, in explaining how utterly blessed we are to be able to call ourselves "children of God". Being a Christian, with this insight into the revelation of God, is a humbling privilege for which we too rarely remember to be grateful.

The next phrase, according to Luke's Gospel, is *Hallowed be your name*. Here's another mystery for us to ponder: God's name is already holy, and nothing we say or do can further increase the holiness of that name; God's halo has no need of being polished by us! What God wants, however, is that His name be made holy, be hallowed, *in us*. Several Psalms speak of the pagan nations glorifying the Lord on account of the mighty deeds He accomplishes for Israel's sake. If we dare to call ourselves Christians, we must actually *be* Christians at all times, living not for ourselves but like Christ, who lived and died so that God's name might be praised by those who see the joy and love which animates our lives as sons and daughters of God.

Your Kingdom come is the next line. The phrase expresses a desire, a wish; when you say this, ask yourself, "*Do I really want God to reign in my heart and in the world around me?*" A follow-up question would be, "*How does God want me to build up His Kingdom here and now?*" Of course God can bring about His Kingdom without us, and ultimately will in His good time; but God wants us, His children, to show everyone around us what that Kingdom will look like—by what we live for and what we would be willing to die for. This is what we ask for when we say *Thy Kingdom come*: that God's Kingdom may be previewed in us.

Give us each day our daily bread. Perhaps Jesus has in mind not simply the ordinary bread put on our table, but the spiritual sustenance by which our souls are nourished. For us, this is nothing less than the Eucharist; the Body of Christ is the fruit of the tree of life which we eat at every Mass, giving us access to the eternal day of God's own life. Whether we go to Mass every

day or every Sunday, the Our Father prayer reminds us that we cannot live, and we cannot love as Christ loves, without this bread from Heaven.

I'll leave the rest of the Our Father to your own meditation. Today's Gospel features a few other sayings of Jesus; they all center around the need to persevere in prayer. Jesus tells us that His Father wants us to be persistent, *to be irritating, to pester God like an annoying neighbor*, in asking for the things we need. Just don't forget that part of the Our Father in Matthew's Gospel which goes *Thy Will be done*- not "my will be done", but the Lord's. If we think of prayer as our conversation to God, and the Eucharist as the nourishment of our soul, we will realize what a comfort and privilege it is to call God our Father, and we will never grow weary of asking Him to build up His Kingdom in us and through us. Amen.

Petitions:

1. In thanksgiving for the gift and witness of Pope Francis' paternal care for all members of the Church, that his example might convert sinners and doubters, and invigorate souls to live for others...
2. For those discerning a priestly or religious vocation, that God may grant them a listening heart at peace with His will for their lives...
3. For all fathers, that their own fatherhood may be nourished and strengthened by the loving example of Our Father in Heaven...
4. For those who are sick, whether mentally, physically or spiritually, that they may receive the consoling and healing power of the divine Physician...