

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary time

Did you notice the way that today's gospel begins? "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.'" Two things seem to be happening. The disciples of Jesus noticed that Jesus himself was a man of prayer. They noticed too that prayer is not something that just happens. Praying is something that we need to learn how to do. As we have been reading St. Luke's gospel this year we have come to realise how prayer is so central to all that Jesus does. His disciples noticed that. They wanted to learn how to pray in the way that Jesus prayed.

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with a prayer with which we have become familiar. But the version we pray is found in Matthew's Gospel. The prayer in Luke is simpler. In Luke's prayer we just call God Father. There is an intimacy here that reflects the intimacy with which Jesus himself prays. There are just five petitions: the first two concern the holiness of God and the establishment of his kingdom. The final three ask for necessary provisions, forgiveness of sins, and freedom from testing. What Jesus prays in his prayer expresses the deepest reality of his own relationship with God. When we pray the Lord's Prayer we express who we are as disciples of Jesus, who desire to be in union with God

and completely dependent upon the one who provides for all our needs.

The second part of our gospel helps us to remember that we need to be persevering in prayer even when our prayers do not seem to be heard. Jesus wants us to be like that friend who comes at midnight, trusting that the door on which we knock will be opened for us. Jesus assures us that if a father can only give to his child what is good, then surely God will only give us what is good. That good is described as the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus does not explain what that means at this point of the gospel, but as we keep reading Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, we will come to understand what that Gift of the Holy Spirit means.

Our first reading today is a very delightful story of how Abraham was very persevering in his prayer for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. It sounds more like what might happen at a marketplace when someone is trying to haggle for something that they want to buy at the lowest possible price. That Abraham could talk in this way to God is a sign of the intimacy that Abraham shared with God. It shows too that God is very tolerant and has an unbelievable willingness to forgive.

If prayer is important in our lives, how did that happen? Who influenced us to become people of prayer? I

suspect that for many of us our grandparents were the ones who taught us to pray by their example and their faith filled lives. Today we are celebrating World Day for grandparents and the elderly. Pope Francis has written a beautiful message for today. Some of it is on the front page of the bulletin. Within that message he speaks about praying in a time of conflict and war. “One fruit that we are called to bring forth is protecting the world. “Our grandparents held us in their arms and carried us on their knees”; now is the time for us to carry on our own knees – with practical assistance or with prayer alone – not only our own grandchildren but also the many frightened grandchildren whom we have not yet met and who may be fleeing from war or suffering its effects. Let us hold in our hearts – like Saint Joseph, who was a loving and attentive father – the little ones of Ukraine, of Afghanistan, of South Sudan...

Many of us have come to a sage and humble realization of what our world very much needs: the recognition that we are not saved alone, and that happiness is a bread we break together. Let us bear witness to this before those who wrongly think that they can find personal fulfilment and success in conflict. Everyone, even the weakest among us, can do this. The very fact that we allow ourselves to be cared for – often by people who come from other countries – is itself a way of saying that

living together in peace is not only possible, but necessary.

Dear grandparents, dear elderly persons, we are called to be artisans of the *revolution of tenderness* in our world! Let us do so by learning to make ever more frequent and better use of the most valuable instrument at our disposal and, indeed, the one best suited to our age: prayer. “Let us too become, as it were, poets of prayer: let us develop a taste for finding our own words, let us once again take up those taught by the word of God”. Our trustful prayer can do a great deal: it can accompany the cry of pain of those who suffer, and it can help change hearts. We can be “the enduring ‘chorus’ of a great spiritual sanctuary, where prayers of supplication and songs of praise sustain the community that toils and struggles in the field of life”.

Whether we are young or old, grandparents or grandchildren, may we take up the invitation of Pope Francis to become people of prayer. When we feel that we cannot find words to say, like the first disciples we can say to Jesus, “Teach us to pray, just John taught his disciples to pray” then we can hear Jesus say to us, “Just pray with me: Father may your name be held holy..”