

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 28, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Father in heaven, Lord of the earth, we humbly place ourselves in your holy presence. In our readings today you teach us about prayer. Help us to be good students and help us especially to pray well. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: Our first reading is a concrete example of a person persevering intercessory prayer, which Jesus speaks about in the Gospel. Both readings also speak about the justice and mercy of God. The second reading is a baptismal instruction in which Paul describes the effects of the Resurrection of Christ in the lives of believers.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: GENESIS 18:20-32

This week's first reading picks up where last week's reading left off. After the departure of the mysterious strangers from his tent, Abraham finds himself walking with the Lord, bargaining over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. The reading is a wonderful example of how to be humble before God *and*, at the same time, assertive and courageous. Also notice how approachable God is in the story. Even though one could see from the reading a wonderful example of one person persevering in prayer (as Jesus exhorts us to do in the Gospel), the reading is more about the *nature of divine justice*. A central question in the conversation between God and Abraham is: *Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?* The answer is obvious. Of course, he should. In the reading, Abraham questions God six times about the parameters of divine justice, and six times God appears to adjust them. The sacred worth of the few is upheld. For the sake of a few innocent people, God is willing to spare the city. (If we read on further, we will find that the city is destroyed because no innocent people could be found.)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 138

This is a psalm of gratitude to God who has given hope to a people feeling lost and abandoned.

SECOND READING: Colossians 2:12-14

Paul shares with us the awesome effects of baptism in the life of the believer. Prior to baptism, the believer is spiritually dead due to sin. In and through the Cross, Jesus cancels our debt of sin. He wipes it out. In the waters of Baptism, believers share in this redeeming work of Christ. Jesus, as it were, takes us down into the tomb of death, washing us totally of sin, and raises us up to new life in him. In Baptism, we become a new creation. The debt owed to God is completely wiped out. In response, we would hopefully desire to struggle daily to remain clean, free, forgiven and faithful.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 11:1-13

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 11:1-13

Jesus responds to his disciple's request for instructions on prayer: "Lord, teach us to pray." We can first note that Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's ('Protestant' version to which is added the words: "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.") Following is a brief comment on each part of the Lord's Prayer that books have been written on:

"Our Father." The prayer is primarily intended to be a community prayer (versus a private one). Notice Jesus says 'Our' Father, and not 'My' Father. Because God is *our* Father, all of us are not only his sons and daughters but also brothers and sisters.

"Father." Scholars love to point out that the word Jesus used for "Father" is more accurately translated "dada" or "pop." This is very important because it tells us that Jesus wants us to share the same close intimacy with his Father that he shared. Ideally, we should approach God with the confidence of a child or with the confidence of Abraham in the first reading.

"Hallowed be your Name." In the Hebrew mind, a person's name stood for his whole character and being. Thus, when we say: "Hallowed be your name," we are saying that "those who know the whole character and mind and heart of God will gladly put their trust in him" (William Barclay).

"Your Kingdom come." May God's kingdom of peace, love, justice and truth become a reality in our world and in the hearts of people.

As we grow in our awareness of the all-powerful and all-holy God, we also become aware of our neediness before God. We need what it takes to make it through each day (daily bread). We need mercy for our sins. And we need strength in times of trial. Note the prayer mentions the "final" test, a reference to the trials that will come at the end of the world. There is also recognition that as we experience God's mercy, we will extend that same mercy to all who have hurt us.

Having taught his disciples to *whom* they should pray (God as Papa) and *what* to pray for (God's Kingdom, bread, mercy and strength in adversity), Jesus then rounds out his lesson with advice on *how* to pray, namely, with persistence. As we read Jesus' brief parable, we should avoid comparing God to the reluctant friend whom we need to hassle to get what we need. Rather, the point is this: if a reluctant,

imperfect friend is willing to answer our plea for help, how much more so will God respond to our prayer. But we must *ask, speak* and *knock*.

[For a fuller commentary on the Lord's Prayer, see Lesson 28 of my Articles on the Catechism. Visit www.ascensioncatholic.net, go to Fr. Tobin's Writings and click on Catechism Topics.]

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort, challenge, or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. What can we learn from Abraham about how to relate to God? And how do you petition God?

3. Do you like setting aside daily time for prayer? If not, why not?

4. Is the prayer "thy will be done" easy or hard for you? What can help you to surrender to God's will when you don't feel like doing it?

5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Try to connect prayer with the issues of your life.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: "*Jesus, when we were baptized, we were made a new creation in you. Help us to be aware of small ways that we can act as a new creation remade in your likeness.*"

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

Pray for the grace of perseverance in prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Prayer before Meditation

*Give me a candle of your Spirit, O God,
as I go down into the deep of my own being.*

Show me the hidden things.

*Take me down to the spring of my life,
and tell me my nature and my name.*

*Give me freedom to grow
so that I may become my true self—
the fulfillment of the seed
which you planted in me at my making.*

Out of the deep I cry unto thee, O God.

Amen.

- George Appleton