17 C 2025

 I wish to insert St Francis’ reflection of the Lord’s prayer, the “Our Father” …Because there is something very human about today’s Scriptures. God is certainly not accorded an aura of otherness or aloofness. God speaks, *“The cries of the victims in Sodom and Gomorrah are deafening. The sin of those cities is immense. I’m going down to see for myself, see if what they are doing is as bad as it sounds. Then I’ll know.”*

His exchange with Abraham is lively and engaging. *“Lord, are You serious? Are You planning on getting rid of the good people right along with the bad?”* Like a shrewd customer at an Oriental bazaar, Abraham presses the Lord to bargaining limits, to determine how far the Lord’s will to save will go. Abraham works skillfully to save as many citizens as possible, and more importantly, to determine the Lord’s sense of justice. Jesus’ parables on perseverance are very down to earth, even humorous. That dimension of our faith should not be overlooked.

*“Hallowed be Thy name.”* May the knowledge of You become more clear, so that we may know the breadth of Your blessings, the length of Your promises, the height of Your majesty, and the depths of Your holy judgments.”

These two cities are popularly known as places were lust and debauchery had risen to an outrageous high. The most serious sin, by biblical standards, was the abuse of the stranger. Hospitality toward the traveler was God’s own law. Violence perpetrated on the visitor deeply violated the duty to protect and care for the stranger. A visitor could easily get killed.

*“Thy Kingdom come.”* …So that You may rule us by Your grace and enable us to come into Your Kingdom, where there is a clear vision of You, a perfect love for You, a blessed companionship with You, and eternal joy and life with You in heaven.”

One has to wonder what the judgment would be on the cities we live in today. Are our streets safe? Do we welcome the foreigner among us? Is the immigrant protected or persecuted by our laws? Do we treat human beings with respect, or with indifference? How much violence will we tolerate, before it’s too much?

*“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* …So that we may love You with our whole heart by always thinking about You; with our whole soul by always desiring You; with our whole mind by always directing all our intentions to You; and be seeking Your glory in everything, with all our strength and by exerting all of our energies and affections, in both body and soul, in service of Your love and nothing else. And may we love our neighbors as ourselves by drawing them to Your love by our whole strength by rejoicing in the good of others, by suffering with them, and by giving no offense to no one.”

In today’s second reading, St Paul imagines sin as a contract with the devil, binding us to death and destruction. When we were stuck in our old sin-dead life, incapable of responding to God, God brought us alive--through the waters of baptism--right along with Christ. All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, the contract nailed to Christ’s cross, staking a new claim on our souls.

*“Forgive us our trespasses.”* …Through Your indescribable mercy, through the power of the Passion of Your Beloved Son, and through the merits and intercession of the ever-blessed Virgin Mary, and all Your angels and saints.”

It’s not unlike Abraham’s bartering for innocent life of those about to face annihilation. But with one difference. Abraham, like a lawyer, makes a case for the innocent. Jesus is willing to advocate for the guilty. We are alive in Christ and dead to sin. The cross is our lifeline and root. Jesus teaches us how to pray, as we live in Him, to the glory of God. We are all one, with one Father. We seek to honor and worship God’s name, and to bring in the Kingdom of God--a kingdom of mercy, justice, charity, and reconciliation, with no harm to anyone in need.

When we ask Jesus how to pray, we ask how to provide for everyone’s need for today, sharing our abundance while trusting in the Father of us all. We ask for mercy, and give it always, everywhere, to everyone. We ask for courage to stand fast in the face of difficulty and temptation, and to stand faithful even at our dying. When we pray, we must attend to God with trust, with confidence, and knowing that God is our Father. And if we must ask, let us ask for the Spirit that binds us all as one.

*“As we forgive those who trespass against us.”* …What we do not completely forgive, help us truly to love our enemies because of You; inspire us to truly pray for them before You; returning no one evil for evil; and may we strive always to help everyone in Your name.”

Prayer requires courage. Imagine the flutter in Abraham’s heart when he asked God to consider the innocent who would suffer with the guilty. Who is Abraham to tell God that God is just? Yet our every prayer of petition is roughly the same. With hearts a-flutter, we ask God according to our perception. It’s a bold thing to do.

*“But deliver us from evil.”* …Past, present, and yet to come.

And so, Jesus encourages us to pray with daring. He tells us to ask God to reveal His divinity. That’s a big request. Jesus also teaches us to ask for more immediate and practical concerns like bread, forgiveness, and to be spared the tug of sin. Jesus says we can ask for anything in prayer, big or small, trusting that the God who loves us, desires our welfare, more than we do. With confidence, then, let us renew our dedication to prayer. Consider what works: St Clare’s method: of gazing, considering, contemplating, and imitating; ritual prayer; lectio divina; centering prayer; praying with icons; song; and movement.

*“Our Father.”* …Most Holy: our Creator, Consoler, Redeemer, and Savior. *“Who art in heaven.”* …In the angels and in the saints, enlightening them to know that You, O Lord, are light, inflaming them to charity; that You, O Lord, are love, dwelling in them and filling them with happiness; that You, O Lord, are the Supreme Good, the Eternal Good, from whom all goodness comes and without whom there is no good.”

The transcendence of God is important for faith, for how we pray, and for forming our conscience. God did not hesitate to plunge into the human scene. In doing so, He accepted limits. He spoke to us in books, written not in universal tongues but in three languages--Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. In becoming flesh, He laughed, cried, told interesting stories, and mixed with both men and women quite freely. In today’s Scriptures, God even lets Abraham, our father in faith, have a good resolution. Jesus tells us that His Father can be pestered, and brought into answering-fascinating insights into God, and the dimensions of a well lived faith.

When we pray let us attend to God with trust, with confidence. Knowing that God is our Father. And if we must ask, ask for the Spirit that binds us all as one.



