

Rev. Kevin V. Madigan
Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel NYC
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17th Sunday of Year C Luke 11:1-13

Someone once said, "Be careful what you pray for, because you might just get it." It is a warning that sometimes our dreams, our desires, our fantasies are not really all that good for us. One of the advantages of growing older is to look back and see that some of those things we once thought we could not live without, which in fact we had to learn to live without, weren't all that important after all, although they certainly did seem so at the time.. The question we might ask ourselves is why do we come here to church to pray, to worship at mass, week after week, Sunday after Sunday? Is it to try to change God's mind, to have God make things turn out better for us in our lives? Or is it that our lives might be changed, that we might have a clearer sense of what our life is all about, and be able to respond appropriately?

When I pray, who is it then, that's doing most of the talking? Is it me, or God? Whose speech is it that we assume matters more—the words of my prayers, or God's Word in the Scriptures? In short, am I doing so much talking in my praying that I am scarcely still at all? Can I manage to be silent long enough to just sit back and do nothing but wait, wait attentively; wait for patterns to reveal themselves, for problems to find wider contexts and thereby shrink in their enormity; wait for signs of good fortune to surface that I was too rushed to notice before; wait for a deeper recognition to emerge as to who exactly "my neighbor" is, and what I can and can't do to alleviate their burdens; wait for the presence of a real but ever mysterious God to surprise me, once again, that God is not what I imagined God to be, but always more?

In today's Gospel Jesus gives us the "Lord's Prayer"—a prayer so universal in scope that it can be said by Christians or Jews or by anyone who believes in some kind of Higher Power. Jesus instructs His disciples to address God as "Father," and more importantly He tells them to use the word "Abba," which in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, was the word that a child would use to speak to his or her father, something like "Daddy" in our language. Jesus is telling them, telling us, that our God is not some distant potentate, but One who desires to be as close to us as a loving Parent.

"Hallowed be your name." We pray that God's name be revered, that the holiness of God be more evident in our lives. When we can't discover God's name, God's presence, God's power within us, then we find ourselves cut off from the very source of life.

A phrase like "Your kingdom come" reveals that our allegiances to all the human institutions we value are certainly legitimate, but they are not ultimate. That which does exercise an ultimate claim upon us is the core of Jesus preaching—the coming of God's kingdom—that state of affairs when God's compassionate love and justice will be realized among all humankind. So, every institution on earth has legitimate authority over us in so far as it advances and promotes the dignity of human beings, made in God's image and likeness,

"Thy will be done." The God whom we look to as a loving Father desires only what is good for us. Another way of understanding these words, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is "May all God's desires for creation be fulfilled." It resembles a mother or father who has great dreams for their child, or a coach who has great dreams for a team, or an artist who has great dreams for a novel or a painting he is creating, or a teacher who has great dreams for his or her students. God has a dream for each of us and for all humanity, so we are praying that that dream be fulfilled.

"Give us each day our daily bread" or supply us with what we really need. Help us distinguish what we need from what we want; help us see when enough is enough. Help us to live within our means, to value what we possess, and not be preoccupied with worries about tomorrow.

We pray, "Forgive us our sins for we too forgive all who do us wrong?" Not much needs be said in commentary about words so stark, but for hurts that still run too deep to accommodate forgiveness, perhaps we can pray that someday we will be able to forgive. It is only forgiveness that will allow something new to happen in our lives, and not simply the past repeating itself over and over again,

It is at the very end of today's passage that Jesus promises what we can be guaranteed we will always receive when we pray, and that is the Holy Spirit, and more precisely what St. Paul calls the "gifts of the Spirit." What are they? They are wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord, which really means a sense of wonder. Jesus does not promise that when we pray we will win the lottery next Tuesday evening. A better prayer might be that we know how to use wisely the winnings from the lottery. The gifts of the Holy Spirit provide the resources we need to make our way through life. They are the qualities that ennoble our character, so that we have the inner strength to deal with whatever life throws at us. With those qualities we have the assurance of having the capacity to meet all the challenges of life.