

## 17<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

Genesis 18:20-32

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:12-14

Luke 11:1-13

### ASK FOR THE BEST GIFT

What is the best possible gift you could ask God for and receive just for the asking? We get the answer in today's gospel – the Holy Spirit! Today we hear about God's graciousness in answering fervent prayer. The secret to receiving is...don't stop asking, seeking, knocking.

### GENESIS

Our first reading is the account of Abraham interceding with God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah, which God had threatened to destroy for their grave sin. Abraham literally bargains with God to spare the city if he can find 50 innocent people...then 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. If ten innocent people can be found, the Lord promises not to destroy the city.

This reading is presented as an example of persistent and insistent prayer by Abraham. But we know that Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as all the surrounding area, ended up being destroyed for sinful homosexual activity, which actually takes its name from Sodom. Abraham and his family were, however, led to safety before the rain of fire and brimstone came down.

### GOSPEL

St. Luke's gospel is known for its emphasis on prayer. In today's selection, one of Jesus' disciples entreated him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." Jesus responds by teaching the Our Father – known as the perfect prayer because it is taught by the Son of God himself.

The rest of today's gospel concerns being persistent in prayer. The friend who needs food keeps knocking so that his neighbor answers him just to get rid of him! The Lord instructs us not to give up but to keep on asking.

The last part of the gospel compares an earthly father with God, our heavenly Father. No human father would deliberately give a harmful gift if his son asks for something good. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" It is interesting to compare this verse with the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel, which says, "how much more will your Father in heaven give *good things* to those who ask him." St. Luke makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is the best of all good gifts!

### COLOSSIANS

Our second reading from Colossians expresses very forcefully the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. We were buried with Christ in baptism and raised through faith in the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead.

St Paul says, "...he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions..." Paul depicts our sins as a legal bill against us. Jesus canceled that legal debt by nailing it to the cross. This is a striking image – not only is the body of Jesus nailed to the cross but our sins are nailed there as well. What a gift indeed!

## PRIORITIES

One way to summarize our readings today is this: “Get your priorities straight!” I suppose another way might be, “don’t stop asking until you get the best gift that God has promised to give.”

It is interesting that, in encouraging us to keep on praying and not to get discouraged, Jesus uses the example of a neighbor who is rather aggravated at the continual knocking on his door when he and his family are trying to sleep! And Jesus told another parable about an unrighteous judge who gives a widow what she is demanding simply because he is tired of being pestered and he just wants to get rid of her (cf. Luke 18:1-8).

The first step in our prayer would be to align our priorities with God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will. Once we do that, we have to keep on knocking, seeking, and asking until we receive.