

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Prayer

July 27, 2025

"Teach us how to pray," the disciples asked Jesus. We want to pray. We want to be with God. This is the longing of our souls. Prayer is what we are about, not just here at Church but as people committed to Jesus Christ. We need to nurture our prayer life, our dialogue with him. We come to Mass to pray the Lord's Supper as a community and to reverence the Lord within us in communion. We call out to the Lord throughout our day whether it is simply grace before meals, or speaking to the Lord the three meditations: "God loves me unconditionally, God forgives me and God is with me", or whether it is devotional prayers like the Rosary, or night prayer. Our days are meant to be united to God in prayer. Prayer expresses who we are, the People of God. The union of our prayers intensifies the presence of God in our community. St. Teresa of Avila famously described prayer as "an intimate sharing between friends," She elaborated on this idea by saying it involves "taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us." This highlights the relational aspect of prayer for Teresa, emphasizing the personal and intimate connection one can have with God as a friend. We need each other for our prayer life to grow. We need each other so we can really celebrate God's presence to such an extent that He becomes present on the altar through the gift of Holy Orders. Sometimes, people say that they don't attend Church, but they pray on their own. It is great that they are praying, but they are depriving themselves of the greatest prayer, the prayer of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, on the Cross and at Easter. It is great that they are praying alone, but by refusing to join the community they are depriving themselves of the Eucharist.

Maybe we all need to reflect a bit about the mystery of the Eucharist. We go to communion so often that it is easy for us to forget what we are doing and whom we are receiving. When we receive communion, Jesus Christ comes inside of us. He is closer to us than our skin. When we receive communion, we worship Him within us with our whole being. Every time we receive communion we take Jesus within ourselves. He is there at the Last Supper, looking at each person here and saying "this is my body, this is my blood, take and eat, take and drink". When we receive communion Jesus is present on the cross saying, "My body is given up for you. My blood is yours. Even if you were the only person to ever live, I would still accept the cross for you. I want to be inside you. I want you to have my body and blood." When we receive communion, Jesus is present within us at the Resurrection. This is the food of the new life of the Kingdom, the food of eternity, the bread of angels. The Eucharist, Holy Communion, the Presence of the Living Lord at the Last Supper, on the Cross and at the Resurrection is within us whenever we receive communion. "Teach us to pray, Lord," the apostles asked. He taught them the Lord's Prayer, and He gave us the Eucharist.

Luke presents the teaching of Jesus concerning prayer having in mind converts like himself. Christians coming from a Jewish background were accustomed to a tradition of daily prayer. Gentile converts, on the other hand, had to acquire a habit of regular prayer. Luke, therefore, stresses perseverance. This gospel may have something to say to us as the pressures of daily life make regular prayer more difficult. 'Teach us to pray'. The disciples are not merely asking how to pray; they want to know what should be the content of the prayer that makes them true followers of Jesus. The Lord's Prayer, as it came to be called, soon had a central place in the Church's life. It was a badge of membership, a measure of the true Christian spirit. In the early Church, those preparing for Baptism learned the Lord's Prayer, but they did not join in public recitation until they shared in the celebration of the Eucharist. 'The Lord's Prayer is the quintessential prayer of the Church. It is an integral part of the major hours of the Divine Office and of the sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Integrated into the Eucharist it reveals the eschatological character of its petitions, hoping for the Lord, "until he comes"' (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2776). In constant use in the Church's life, this prayer has evolved. We are more familiar with the form it has in Matthew's gospel (6: 9-13). Luke's succinct wording, however, makes clear the essentials of the prayer of Jesus. "In the Our Father, the object of the first three petitions is the glory of the Father; the sanctification of his name, the coming of the kingdom and the fulfillment of his will. The four others present our wants to him: they ask that our lives be nourished, healed of sin and made victorious in the struggle of good over evil." (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2857)

Prayer cleanses from sin, drives away temptations, stamps out persecutions, comforts the fainthearted, gives new strength to the courageous, brings travelers safely home, calms the wave, feeds the poor, overrules the rich, lifts up the fallen, supports those who are falling, sustains those who stand firm. All the angels pray. Every creature prays. Cattle and wild beasts pray and bend the knee... The birds too rise and lift themselves up to heaven: they open out their wings, instead of hands, in the form of a cross, and give voice to what seems to be a prayer. (Treatise on Prayer by Tertullian, priest) What more need be said on the duty of prayer? Even the Lord himself prayed. The insistence of Jesus on perseverance may puzzle us. Jesus spent long periods in private prayer and he attached much importance to it. The success of his daily activity flowed from prayer. Prayer is an offering that belongs to God and is acceptable to him: it is the offering he has asked for, the offering he planned as his own. We must dedicate this offering with our whole heart, we must fatten it on faith, tend it by truth, keep it unblemished through innocence and clean through chastity, and crown it with love. We must escort it to the altar of God in a procession of good works to the sound of psalms and hymns. Then it will gain for us all that we ask of God.

The problem for us, however, is that we give up too easily. Very often it's because we are not sure how to pray, what to say or if our prayers are ever heard. Sometimes, we don't want to pray anymore because God does not seem to be listening. The truth is that we give up too soon, even before we start. We need to learn from the disciples and ask Jesus to teach us to pray. We need to learn also from Jesus to speak spontaneously from our heart to the Father in heaven. Pope Francis teaches that prayer is essential to Christian life, a dialogue with God that should be practiced always, even when it's difficult or feels like God is not listening. He emphasizes that prayer is a source of strength, freedom, and a path to encountering God, particularly through the Holy Spirit. He encourages believers to pray with spontaneity and freedom, recognizing prayer as a gift and not an obligation. As the Our Father reveals, the tone of the prayer is both intimate and mysterious. God is our Father whose kingdom we seek, and who can be trusted to provide for our genuine needs. The way we talk to God should be intimate and loving, just like talking to our family members. We need to be walking in his company, paying loving attention to his presence and deepening our relationship with him. When we place our petitions before God, they will be answered as he sees fit. Whatever his response, we can be sure it is for our good. Prayer makes us realize how much we need God and deepens our sense of dependence on his saving help. We become aware that we stand before God in weakness, powerlessness and yet in the hope that his grace can make something of us. In the rush and noise of life, which drowns out the voice of God, we must find a time and a place of silence to pray. It is only in silence that we can speak to God and God can speak to us.