

17th SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - OUR FATHER.

For me these days at the end of July mark the end of our parish year, I normally take a break in August, Ill will be away for a week from Wednesday 6th August, another Carribean cruise!! The closest I will get to the Caribbean is a cruise on the Manchester ship canal, and our school has just begun its long summer break, many of you will be taking holidays as well. These days mark the end of one year of work and then September the beginning of another, and so I normally get a little bit reflective and think on all that has been happening. These past weeks in our parish have been certainly very exciting, we had the 1st H.C mass, when 16 children made their 1st holy communion. There have also been lots of weddings in our parish, 9 this year, and it is always very special as a priest to conduct a wedding service and share in the joy of the couples getting married. We also had last weekend our parish outing to Harvington Hall, 40 parishioners, young and old had a lovely day there together. Not that long ago we also had our wonderful celebration of Pentecost Sunday as well. The school term/year has come to an end, we had a leavers mass for the students of year 6, always an emotional occasion as they prepare for their new schools in September, and also a full school mass

As last week, appropriately the theme of the readings today is Prayer, with the giving of the Our Father by Jesus, this is our lords definitive teaching on prayer. Now Last week we heard about Jesus having a meal in the house of two sisters called Martha and Mary, and how Mary much to her sisters annoyance just sat at the feet of Jesus listening to him and being instructed, and Jesus said that she had chosen the better part; the life of prayer. Today, we have the Disciples asking Jesus how they should pray, they had seen him praying and they wanted his guidance, and in answer he gave them the Our Father-that great prayer which now forms the heart of all our prayers.

We are all so familiar with the Our Father, we say it every day, but how much do we really think about it, because it really is an amazing prayer, it requires so much of us to truly pray it. The first phrase in it is the greatest, "Our Father, who art in heaven". We can call God, Father, this was unheard of at the time of Jesus, it was a far to familiar phrase to use of God, God wasn't called Father. God was seen as being a just God but also a bit harsh, he would punish wrongdoers severely, he wasn't really talked about as a loving Father. We can see this in the first reading today, when we see Abraham praying to God and trying to turn back his anger against the people of Sodom and Gomorrah; God is presented as wanting to punish the evil there even if it meant killing some just men. But, Jesus, because he was the Son of God could talk about God as being a Father, and therefore we can as well. So because God is our father our prayers are effective, because God will listen to the prayers of his children.

Never forget how special you are, how special you are to God, it reminds of the great relationship we have with God, calling him Our Father, reminds us that we are his children. We know this because God sent his Son to die for us, so that we might be saved, so that our sins might be forgiven This is why we can pray and call God, Father, because God loves us and wants to spend eternity with us in heaven. Do we really believe this, do we believe that God really loves us. We are all beloved by God, perhaps the reason why we all find prayer so hard is, because we don't really believe that God is a Father, and that he loves us as a Father does. In other words we are all lacking in faith, we don't always and everywhere act as if God was our Father. Instead we so often ignore him, we only want to fulfil our own desires, to obey the Gods of money, ambition and pride. But as we pray in the

Our Father, "Thy will be done", may God's will be done not ours. This is the secret of being able to pray, wanting God's will to be done, to listen to him in prayer. But then if we read on in the Gospel today, we are told to almost demand what we need of God in prayer. "Ask and it will be given, knock and the door will be answered." But to be able to knock on the door, we need to have faith, we need to believe we will be answered; and so many of us, including me, so often just want to rely on ourselves. We don't like being humble, we don't like being out of control of our lives, so we often don't like to pray. Last week I talked about prayer as listening to God, being quiet in his presence, but today we are reminded that prayer is all about expressing our faith and asking God for the things that we need; Prayer works, we have to have faith, we have to be humble, we have to be willing to listen to God to accept what he sends us, as well as asking him for what we need.

Finally, when we pray we should also try not to just ask for things, but to give thanks, to say thank you to God for his blessings, for the prayers that have been answered-I think it is something we very easily forget to do, to say thank you to God, and as a parish we have a lot to thank God for, to thank God for guiding us through the events of the past year, to thank him for all the ways he has blessed us and blessed this parish community.