

Sunday Sermon July 27, 2025

“Lord, teach us to pray...” That’s what one of Jesus’ disciples asks Him in today’s Gospel. I’ve always taken a bit of comfort in that. Even Jesus’ own disciples, his closest followers, needed Jesus to teach them how to pray. We presume they attended synagogue and engaged in prayer around their dinner table at home, but there must have been something special and compelling about how Jesus prayed. We get the sense that they were observing him at prayer and seeing that it was different. And so they asked – “Lord, teach us to pray...”

We hear about one kind of prayer in today’s first reading, where Abraham is bargaining with God for the righteous people of Sodom. “Lord, if there are 50 righteous... 45? 40? 10??? A bargaining prayer. We might pray this way sometimes, a prayer of desperation, “Lord, just get me through this and I’ll turn my life around, I promise!”

I have this little book entitled: “Children’s Letters to God.” These are a type of prayer – children sending their questions and comments to God. Here’s a sample:

Clever, innocent, humorous little letters, messages that teach us something important. They teach us that God is approachable, that God cares for us, God’s children, and is interested in even our smallest questions or concerns. God is a loving parent. That’s the essence of Jesus’ teaching his disciples to call God “Father.”

Jesus says, “when you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name.” Prayer is relationship. We can experience, we can hear, we can know God, the way we can experience, hear and know a parent. God knows us and loves us the way a parent knows and loves her child. Loving relationship.

God isn’t a proposition or an idea floating around in the air, God is as knowable and real as a living, breathing, loving human being.

“Your kingdom come.” The kingdom of heaven, yes, the life beyond this one, and also your kingdom here on earth. The reign of God made manifest in peace, justice and love in this world “as it is in heaven.” Prayer is bigger than just my personal, individual needs and wants. God calls us to be builders of God’s kingdom here and now. When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, we are pledging to embody God’s values and priorities in our daily lives. We are pledging to model our life on

Jesus' life, to pay attention to what He said and did and to follow His example so that God's reign will come to be "on earth as in heaven."

The promise to pray for someone, or for some situation or concern, needs to be accompanied by our willingness to help, to work for change, in tangible ways.

"Give us each day our daily bread." Give us enough for today. The manna in the wilderness could not be kept, because it would spoil. Give us bread for today, hearts willing to share so that no one will be hungry. Give trust that you will provide for tomorrow and a grateful heart for what we have today.

"Forgive us our sins, as we forgive others." This is a tough one. We can easily mumble this petition thoughtlessly, but it's good to pause and remember what we're asking – that God forgive us the way we forgive others. I don't know about you, but I'm tempted to hold grudges, thinking I'm getting back at someone who's hurt me by not letting them off the hook. But it's often been said: holding a grudge is like drinking rat poison and hoping the rat will die. It only hurts us. The prayer compels us to forgive so that we might be free of the hurt.

"And do not bring us to the time of trial." Keep us from danger and harm, walk with us through our difficulties and challenges so we know we are not alone.

One of the things the Lord's Prayer teaches us is that prayer isn't so much about trying to change God, as it's about changing us. It was Soren Kierkegaard who noted that "prayer doesn't change God, it changes the person who prays."

In her book **The Breath of a Soul**, Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister reflects on what it means to embrace an attitude of prayer:

"Prayerfulness . . . is the capacity to walk in touch with God through everything in life. It is the internal awareness that God is with me — now, here, in this, always. It is an awareness of the continuing presence of God. It is my dialogue with the living God who inhabits my world in Spirit and in mind.

"Prayerfulness sees God everywhere.

"Prayerfulness talks to God everywhere.

“Prayerfulness submits the uncertainties of the moment to the scrutiny of the internal eye of God. It trusts that no matter how malevolent the situation may be, I can walk through it unharmed because God is with me . . .

“Prayerfulness is fostered by the simple consciousness that God is. That God is near us at all times. That God is closer to us than the breath we breathe. That God is available, a silence in the midst of chaos, a voice in the midst of confusion, a promise at the center of the tumult.

“If I ask and I listen and I reach out and fill my heart with the words of the One who is the Word, then I will be answered. Somehow the path will become clear.”

Similarly, Brother David Rast says this: “Prayer is not the same thing as *prayers*. Prayer is waking up to the presence of God no matter where I am or what I am doing. When I am fully alert to whatever or whoever is right in front of me, when I am electrically aware of the tremendous gift of being alive; when I am able to give myself wholly to the moment I am in, then I am in prayer. Prayer is happening, and it is not necessarily something that I am doing. God is happening, and I am lucky enough to know that I am in The Midst.”

Jesus was in The Midst as He prayed a long time ago. It inspired his closest friends to ask Him to teach them how to experience God in this way, and He brought them into relationship with the Holy One who can be experienced and known. The One who loves us the way a parent loves a child.

The One who promises us a wonderful kingdom of love in the next life and inspires us to build the kingdom of justice, love and peace here, in this world, so that we will get a taste of heaven.

The One who provides for us daily bread, asking us to share and to trust and to be grateful for our blessings. The One who forgives us and asks us to forgive so that there will be peace and harmony among God’s Children. And who is with us through it all, through every trial and tribulation we might face. We are never alone.

Prayer is relationship. A relationship that can change us. Helping us to see the world as God sees it, and to love the world and the people in it as God loves, each and every one. “Prayer doesn’t change God, it changes the person who prays.”

May we be people of prayer who are shaped by our prayers.

Amen.