

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12)
St. Luke 11:1-13

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

One of the things it seems that St. Luke tried to teach Theophilus (and, of course, every Christians and lover of God) is the importance of prayer. From the prayers of praise and thanksgiving from Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon in his first two chapters, to showing that Jesus was Himself a man of prayer who sought His Father's aid during significant times in His ministry (check out chapters 3, 6, 9, and 22, among others), St. Luke's Gospel is filled with prayer.

If anything, from St. Luke's account, the disciples should have learned of the importance of prayer by observing the discipline with which Jesus prayed and the frequency of His prayers. Jesus would often depart to a solitary place and pray to His Father in heaven. He prayed to His Father in Heaven because He was the Son of God and a Man of faith. He prayed to His Father because He relied on His Father for everything that He needed. His disciples observed this in St. Luke's Gospel; every Theophilus should find this hard to miss when reading St. Luke's Gospel.

The Church has learned the lesson St. Luke taught: prayer is an important part of the baptismal life. Read any older catechism published by CPH (that is, any translation before the 1991 translation), and you will read that the Church teaches that prayer **IS** worship. Flip through the liturgies of the Church, and you will see that she has made use of those prayers of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, for she now prays the *Magnificat* with Mary, the *Benedictus* with Zechariah, and the *Nunc Dimittis* with Simeon.

It can be safely said that the disciples learned their lesson, too. For in observing the importance of prayer, today you heard them ask Jesus how to pray. For far too long they had witnessed their master and teacher pray—they had even seen John the Baptist teach his disciples how to pray—so, they wish to pray to God as well. Jesus wasted no time; he answered them directly and gave them a specific prayer:

And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

Jesus gave them the very words they should pray.

But He didn't stop there. He went on to illustrate for them the meaning of that prayer. Specifically, He taught what it means to call upon God as Father. Jesus was not merely saying "Father" when giving His disciples the prayer because God the Father is His Father; no, He was telling the disciples to call upon God as **their** Father as well!

Jesus taught His disciples the importance of this prayer, that by it they ask for every blessing in life that is needful, and that by asking for it with these words, God will answer.

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs."

"Ask, and it will be given to you," Jesus taught with this illustration. It is with the prayer He taught that the disciples were to ask of their Father. What were they supposed to ask for? Daily bread and forgiveness; for it is in this prayer that all that is needed for daily life is sought, be it house and home,

food and clothing, etc....and forgiveness, for you daily sin much and are in constant need of God's mercy and forgiveness. And with this illustration, Jesus taught an important concept in prayer that St. Paul put so succinctly: "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Be always asking.

But before the disciples could begin to think that it was their persistence that motivated God to answer prayer, Jesus gave another illustration. With this, Jesus taught that persistence is necessary because His disciples (and you) are in constant need, much like He Himself was (for He constantly sought His Father's aid during significant times in His ministry). No, God the Father's motivation for answering prayer is different.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

In hearing and answering prayer, God the Father is motivated by love and compassion. For if those of you who are fathers, even in your evil sinfulness, know how to give good gifts to your children, would you not expect the same and more from a Heavenly Father who is holy and righteous and just?

The Lord's Prayer teaches the Holy Life. The prayer that Jesus gave to the disciples is given to you to pray as well. The command to pray is not only for the 12, but for all who would follow Jesus and His Way. And with that command comes the promise. Did you notice the gift Jesus says you ask of in this prayer: "...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The Reverend Peter Bender put it this way:

We pray to Him, because He has promised us His Holy Spirit, the gift of faith, forgiveness of sins, rescue from temptation, death, and the devil, and every temporal and spiritual blessing to support us in this body and life. Each petition of the Lord's Prayer is first and foremost God's promise to us in Christ; then it becomes our prayer when it is received in faith. In the Lord's Prayer we ask that our heavenly Father would do for us what He Himself has promised to do.

"The petitions of the Lord's Prayer have the absolute guarantee and certainty of His Word" because they are His Word!

"The human heart is by nature so desperately wicked that it always flees from God, thinking that he neither wants nor cares for our prayers because we are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath," Martin Luther once said. The struggle with the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh would tell you that you are unworthy to approach the throne of God in prayer. This is an attempt to get you to despise His Word and to fall into the deep pit of despair so that you curse God, abandon all prayer and worship to Him, and follow your own desires, seek your own gain (and if you fail, oh well, you tried), and make do the best you can. After all, since you are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath, as the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh have proven, then you might as well make the best of it—you might as well do the best with what you have—"if life throws you lemons" and all that—and prepare to die in that sin.

What the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh fail to tell you is that there are no strings attached to God's promises. You have the Word of God which you pray because He has commanded you to pray, you have been *given* the Lord's Prayer. Attached with that command is God's promise to hear your prayer and answer it; so by that you see that the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh have lied to you!

But there is also a bit of truth to what that "unholy triumvirate" have said. You are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath before God! When you pray the Lord's Prayer, you acknowledge as much, as Luther taught:

We pray...that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.

But as you have been commanded to prayer "forgive us our sins," God has promised to hear and answer that petition. And in answering that petition, God points to the cross, where His only-begotten Son shed His blood for you and died with your sin, so that you wouldn't have to. In answering that petition, God points to the font, where you were washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism and all the merits of Christ death were given to you; He points to the font, where the Holy Spirit descended on you to keep you in the one, true faith; He points to the font, where He claimed you as His son, so that you could approach Him as God the Father, just as you can approach your earthly fathers! He points to the altar on which sit the bread and wine that are (or will soon be) Christ's body and blood which you eat and drink for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In and of yourselves, you are nothing. By your merit, your prayers are nothing. But thanks be to God that your prayers are spoken in faith—God-given faith—and by God's command. Luther concluded, "From the fact that prayer is so urgently commanded, we ought to conclude that we should by no means despise our prayers, but rather prize them highly...On this I can rely and depend, and I can revere it highly, not because of my worthiness, but because of the commandment." The Reverend Peter Bender concluded, "We believe that God hears and answers our prayers, not because of the merit, worthiness, or frequency of our prayers, but because of His grace to us in Christ and the promises of His Word. *This is the motivation for a Christian's frequent and fervent prayer.*" And that is the Holy Life which the Lord's Prayer teaches. That is the importance of prayer that St. Luke teaches. It's the Holy Life which you have attained not of your own worth, works, or merits, but because by grace you have been and are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.