

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Fr. Bob

Today's readings from God's Word are about prayer. Throughout the ages how a people prayed indicated what kind of community they were. The disciples want to be taught how they should pray—As Jewish people it wasn't as if they didn't have a sense of prayer—but how should they, as followers of Jesus pray.

Sr. Jose Hobday talks about her mother who taught her how she should pray.

"Like all mothers, she could always tell when something was bothering me. She'd say to me, "All right, Jo. I think it's time you went outside and found yourself a Sacrifice Flower. It's time you get your burden lifted from your heart and give it to God."

So, I would go looking for a flower. Sometimes Mother would go out with me to help me with my flower or talk about what was bothering me. Sometimes, too, she had something weighing on her heart, and she would find a Sacrifice Flower of her own. That flower was supposed to be special, one that meant a lot to me. As a girl, I like dandelions, hollyhocks, and daisies. So I usually picked one of them. In addition, Mother said I was to be very careful with the flower because it had been selected for a holy purpose. I lovingly cupped it in my hands so nothing would happen to it.

When I got home, I did as my mother instructed and told the flower what burden I wanted lifted and taken to God. How was the flower to do this? Remember, this was a Sacrifice Flower, one that was going to die. The idea was that as life went out of the flower, it would carry my prayer to God. That meant, of course the flower was not to be placed in water.

I had a shelf in my room that I like to use for my Sacrifice Flower because it was sort of private and yet I could see it as I went in and out. Every time I saw the flower, I could see it giving its life for me, and I could imagine my prayer being carried to God. That was true even when I was elsewhere and was just thinking about the flower. Either way, I had a strong sense my prayer was being heard.

My flower and I were in union. Sometimes it took a few days, sometimes a couple of weeks. When the flower finally died, I would take it outside, say good-bye to it, and thank it for giving life for me and delivering my prayer.

Then I would bury it so it would have a chance at a new life, and I always hoped it would come back as an even nicer flower. In this simple, graphic way my mother taught me how uplifting prayer can be. And, in the process, she taught me about life, too—how basic both dying and rising are to living, and how important it is that we become Sacrifice Flowers for each other.

Sr. Jose Hobday's Sacrifice Flower—her special way of praying reflects the kind of God she believes in.

Her trust that her burdens would be lifted, that her God received them, that transformation can happen underscores the way she lives her life.

The disciples have been following Jesus—they have been listening to his words and watched how he gathered all about him. And now he illustrates this Way by the Words he teaches them.

First of all they understand their God as one they could draw close to—They could talk to their God as Abba, as Papa, as Daddy. And this was different from the more formal names given to God—the distant great God.

The disciples are to reverence that God and to accept the reign in their lives—God's way, God's love is to be their way.

Thirdly, the disciples in asking for daily bread, for continual bread—the bread that keeps coming the disciple acknowledges his/her continual dependence on God for life, sustenance and every other blessing...today, tomorrow, every day.

The disciples also ask for forgiveness but recognize that they need also to forgive. And this leads to confidence that if they are sinful people can forgive then they can appeal to a God who epitomizes mercy and forgiveness.

And finally when Jesus teaches his disciples to talk to God it is all "we" and "us" as opposed to "I" and "Me" and "they" and "them". When we talk to God as Jesus has taught us, we are necessarily drawn in to his relationships, with God and with all whom he has embraced and loved as brothers and sisters.

This ability to pray to a God who is close—to ask for forgiveness—to ask for sustenance is based on the belief in a God who is merciful, just, caring and good.

This is the kind of God that Abraham believed in and thus the exciting encounter we hear in the first reading today. One of Martin Luther's contemporaries once said of him, "I overheard him in prayer, but good God, with what life and spirit did he pray! It was with so much reverence, as if he were talking to God, yet with so much confidence as if he were talking to his friend." This was Abraham's stance—respectful trust of a good friend.

How do we pray? Do we really believe in a God who loves us? Do we trust in a God who wants for our good? Do we have confidence that we can open our hearts, open our minds and approach this God who created us?

How we pray—how we live our prayer in union with one another will reflect what we believe. In fact the heresies of the centuries are the instances of people who pretended to be believers but forgot that God was merciful—and so God would exclude those other people. Or people forgot the word "we" in praying and were concerned only for the "me". Or perhaps the heresy is the one of forgetting the dependency on God and instead trying to make up God's mind for God—manipulating God, boxing up God and having it our way instead.

The fact is—if we believe in a God who gives and is merciful and loves—if we believe in a God like this then it forms us and creates us anew each day in our approach to others.

Believing in a God like that makes it hard—impossible for us to look across the room and judge another— it makes it wrong to hate the other—no matter what the other has done. Believing in a God like that makes it impossible to see myself separated—any more than a wave can be separated—any more than a wave can be separated from the sea.

We're all the children of a loving Daddy—And that forms us and lightens us and frees us.

Let's revel in the belief of that kind of God this summer week—let our week be a prayer formed by that belief.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Genesis 18:20-32

Colossians 2:12-14

Luke 11:1-13

July 28, 2013

靈 修 生 活

信 心 與 行 動

蔡 惠 民 神 父

有一個人每天虔誠的禱告，祈求天主讓他一注獨得多寶獎金，但他從來沒贏過，因此他愈來愈沮喪，並開始對天主感到憤怒。最後他實在忍不住了，怒氣沖沖的衝到教堂，站在祭台前揮拳舞爪叫囂，「如果祢是天主，為甚麼我的祈禱從不實現？我已經求您很久了，希望你能讓我贏得多寶獎金，但是我卻每次都不中！祢為甚麼不幫助我？」突然間，一個低沉的聲音從祭台上方響起，「你至少應該先買張六合彩吧？」

聽過索多瑪和哈摩辣的故事，相信不少人會羨慕亞巴郎的祈禱心得。話說索多瑪和哈摩辣兩座城的罪惡非常嚴重，控告他們的聲音實在很大，天主決意要消滅他們。亞巴郎知道後，便向天主求情說：「祢真要將義人和惡人一起消滅嗎？」(創十八 23-24) 天主爽快答應：「假如我在索多瑪城中找出五十個義人，為了他們，我要赦免這地方。」(創十八 26) 之後，亞巴郎竟得寸進尺，跟天主討價還價，從四十五個、四十個、三十個，一直到十個。天主仍爽快地答應：「為了這十個，我也不毀滅。」(創十八 32) 故事的完結是亞巴郎找不到十個義人，無法阻止索多瑪和哈摩辣的毀滅懲罰。不過，他並沒有遺憾，因為天主實在一次又一次的接納他的請求，要怪的，只是兩城人民的不爭氣。

與此相比，很多人向天主祈求的心得剛好相反。例如，一個教友知道媽媽患了癌症後很擔心，便向天主祈求說：「天主，求祢大發慈悲，使她早日康復出院，一家團聚。」之後，這位教友接受了事實，逐步調低自己的要求：「主，求祢不要使她的癌細胞擴散！」「主，求祢給她多一點時間，不要立刻收回她的性命！」「主，求祢讓她在平安中離去！」不過，天主似乎每次都無動於衷，連最低的要求也沒有答允。最後，這位教友很沮喪地問：「究竟是天主的問題，抑或是我自己的祈求不恰當？」

首先，亞巴郎的天主和我們的天主沒有分別，對於人的請求，祂從來不會置若罔聞。耶穌以肯定的語氣對門徒說：「凡求的，就必得到；找的，就必找到；敲的，就必給他開。」(路十一 10) 天主也沒有限制我們祈求的內容。當門徒要求耶穌教給他們祈禱時，祂說：「你們祈禱時要說：父啊！願祢的名被尊為聖！願祢的國來臨！我們的日用糧，求祢天天賜給我們。」(路十一 2-3) 日用糧不只是三餐，也是我們生活的一切所需，從基本的食物、健康、以致學業、工作、家庭、社會，無一不是我們可以向天主祈求的內容。那麼，縱使我們求的只是日用糧。為甚麼總是求而不得，找而不著，敲而不開呢？

其實，天主經不是基督徒獨有的祈禱經文。在耶穌的時代，很多猶太人也懂得以天主經祈禱。耶穌要教導門徒的不是新的祈禱內容，而是要指出新的祈禱態度。祂以一篇猶太人耳熟能詳的經文為例，希望門徒意識祈禱不單是信心的表達，同時也是行動的實踐。

天主經以「我們的天父」作開始，正好提醒我們彼此都是天父內的一家人。父所關心的，自然也該是一家人共同關心的。當有人向父祈求時，祂也希望我們去滿全他；當有人敲父的門時，祂也希望我們打開心扉接納他；當有人心急如焚的尋找幫助時，祂也希望我們能解決他的困難。因此，耶穌教導門徒，幾時有朋友夜半需要三個餅，縱使他已和孩子一同在床上，他也要起來，給那人所需要的一切。(路十一 5-8) 父就是要通過我們使求者必得，找者必著，敲者必得。一個人愈相信祈禱，愈發現祈禱怎樣透過自己的行動得以實現。

當然，有些事情，無論我們怎樣祈禱，也是不能改變的。例如天災橫禍、疾病死亡，祈禱也不能逆轉事實的發生。有時我們會感到矛盾，天主為甚麼要將我們所愛的帶走？我們所求的，不是自私，也不是貪婪，而是為他人的好處，為甚麼天主也不垂允？在這些不解的時刻，祈禱更要帶領我們進入天父的信心裡。「你們中間那有為父親的，兒子向他求餅，反而給他石頭呢？或是求魚，反將蛇當魚給他呢？或者求雞蛋，反將蝎子給他呢？你們縱然不善，尚且知道把好東西給你們的兒女，何況在天之父，有不更將聖神賜與求祂的人嗎？(路十一 11-13) 「我們的父」除了使我們意識是天父的一家人，也提醒我們這位父是天上的父。祂的信心，跨越死亡，恆古不變，我們還有甚麼會永久失去的呢？

摘自「公教報」