

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Genesis 18:20-32

Unusual though the circumstance is, this week's Old Testament reading continues the Old Testament reading we heard last week. As you will recall, last week we heard of Abraham's encounter with the three visitors and the promise of a son (Genesis 18:1-10). Today we hear of Abraham's bargaining with God over the fate of Sodom. This story expresses our need to pray for ourselves and for others, as Abraham did. It also shows that prayers are heard.

²⁰ [In those days,] the LORD said: “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, ²¹ that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out.”

This represents what is thought to be a primitive theology (see also Genesis 11:5 – the Tower of Babel) wherein God does not see all – but receives reports.

²² While the two men walked on farther toward Sodom,

In last week's reading, Abraham received three visitors: The Lord (God) and two angels. This is a continuation of that story. The two angels go off to investigate Sodom; Abraham stays behind to stand before Yahweh, into whose confidence he has been taken.

the LORD remained standing before Abraham. ²³ Then Abraham drew nearer to him and said: “Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?”

Abraham wants to know whether the judge of all the world will deal justly. Abraham, though conscious of the distance between himself and God, dares to commence bargaining with God to the point that only ten righteous suffice to avert destruction.

²⁴ Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty, so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?” ²⁶ The LORD replied, “If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” ²⁷ Abraham spoke up again: “See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes! ²⁸ What if there are five less than fifty innocent people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?” “I will not destroy it,” he answered, “if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹ But

Abraham persisted, saying, "What if only forty are found there?" He replied, "I will forebear doing it for the sake of the forty." ³⁰ Then he said, "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?" He replied, "I will forebear doing it if I can find but thirty there." ³¹ Still he went on, "Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?" "I will not destroy it," he answered, "for the sake of the twenty." ³² But he still persisted: "Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time. What if there are at least ten there?" "For the sake of those ten," he replied, "I will not destroy it."

Ten is the natural limit in Abraham's questioning; below that number God can save individuals within the city as will happen with Lot.

2nd Reading - Colossians 2:12-14

Last week we heard Paul tell of his role in proclaiming the gospel. This week we hear him as he answers the Judaizers. To better understand today's reading, it is necessary to back up one verse: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ."

The "circumcision of Christ" to which Paul refers is baptism. In the Old Covenant, the rite of initiation into God's family was circumcision. In the New Covenant, this same rite of initiation is baptism. In the Old Covenant, the mark was on the physical body but under the New Covenant, the mark is placed on the soul.

12 You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

See Romans 6:3-6. In Romans 6:5, those who have died with Christ in baptism will in the future be united with Him in resurrection; in Colossians this resurrection has already happened.

"And on that night of His passion and death He showed them the Sacrament of Baptism, just as the Apostle has stated: 'You have been buried with Him in Baptism unto death, and you have risen up with Him in the power of God (Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12).' Know then, my beloved, that the Baptism of John was of no value for the forgiveness of sins, but for repentance." [Aphraates the Persian Sage (between A.D. 336-345), *Treatises* 12,10]

13 And even when you were dead (in) transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him,

Saint Paul is directing the teaching to the members of the community, pagan converts. He is describing the result of being in union with Christ, the forgiveness of sins. When they were baptized, all prior sins were forgiven (see Acts 2:38).

having forgiven us all our transgressions;

Baptismal regeneration. Baptism forgives all previous sins.

¹⁴ obliterating the bond against us,

This word translated as “bond” is found only here in the New Testament and is used to indicate a handwritten bond of debt. The indebtedness may be the necessity of paying the penalty for an infraction of the Law – death was punishment for disobedience. The covenant curse of death came upon all mankind because of the sin of Adam.

with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.

Mankind could not be redeemed until this debt had been paid, by Jesus, through His offering on the cross.

“See to it that we do not again become debtors to the old contract. Christ came once; he found the certificate of our ancestral indebtedness which Adam wrote and signed. Adam contracted the debt; by our subsequent sins we increased the amount owed. In this contract are written a curse, and sin, and death and the condemnation of the Law. Christ took all these away and pardoned them. Saint Paul cries out and says: ‘The decree of our sins which was against us, he has taken it completely away, nailing it to the cross.’ He did not say ‘erasing the decree,’ nor did he say ‘blotting it out,’ but ‘nailing it to the cross,’ so that no trace of it might remain. This is why he did not erase it but tore it to pieces.” [Saint John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 388-389), *Baptismal Catecheses* 3,21]

Gospel - Luke 11:1-13

Having heard the parable of the good Samaritan two weeks ago and the visit to Martha and Mary’s home last week, this week we hear Luke’s rendition of the “Our Father” and Jesus’ teaching on prayer. Luke’s version of the “Our Father” is different enough from Matthew’s version to indicate that each must stem from a separate liturgical tradition in the early Church. In Matthew there are seven petitions, in Luke only four. Both forms have been translated into Aramaic and this shows that both versions were composed in rhyme; a type of poetry that can be traced to Jewish synagogal prayers of the 1st century A.D.. The Church uses the longer form of the Lord’s prayer, that of Saint Matthew in the Mass.

11:1 He was praying in a certain place,

Recall that Jesus always prays just before something of theological significance in Luke’s gospel.

and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.”

To have its own distinctive form of prayer was the mark of a religious community. Jesus will not only teach them to pray, but how to live out the prayer and act as His followers.

² He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father,

When our Lord prays, He begins with the word “Father”. *Father into thy hands I commit my spirit* (Luke 23:46). We can say that the first characteristic prayer should have is the simplicity of a child speaking to its father.

hallowed be your name,

In this first petition to our Father, we pray God may be known, lived, honored and served by everyone; and by ourselves in particular. This means that we want unbelievers to come to a knowledge of the true God, heretics to recognize their errors, schismatics to return to the unity of the Church, sinners to be converted, and the righteous to persevere in doing good. By this first petition, our Lord is teaching us that we must desire God’s glory more than our own interest and advantage.

your kingdom come.

By the kingdom of God we understand a triple spiritual kingdom: the kingdom of God in us, which is grace; the kingdom of God on earth, which is the Church; and the kingdom of God in heaven, which is eternal bliss. We pray that God reign in us with His sanctifying grace; we pray that His Church extend and spread all over the world for the salvation of men; and we pray that one day we be admitted to that eternal bliss for which we have been created.

³ Give us each day our daily bread

The tradition of the Church usually interprets the bread as not only material bread, since “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Here Jesus wants us to ask God for “what we need each day for soul and body.” For our soul we ask God to sustain our spiritual life, that is, we beg Him to give us His grace, of which we are continually in need. The life of our soul is sustained mainly by the divine Word and by the Eucharist.

⁴ and forgive us our sins

Luke has “sins” in place of Matthew’s “debts”.

for we ourselves forgive

Here is the only instance in the “Our Father” of an action on the Christian’s part. So rigorously does God exact from us forgetfulness of injuries and mutual affection and love, that He rejects and despises gifts and sacrifices of those who are not reconciled to one another (Matthew 5:23-24).

everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test."

The final onslaught of the demon. The disciples pray that their ever loving God will preserve them from apostasy from the Christian Way.

5 And he said to them,

Only Luke gives this parable which teaches that one of the essential features of prayer is trusting perseverance. Our Lord encourages us not to desist in asking God to hear us, Persevere even when your efforts seem barren. Prayer is always fruitful. Saint Monica prayed for Saint Augustine's conversion for thirty years before it happened.

"Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' ⁷ and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed.

The entire family slept on a mat in the raised part of a single-roomed peasant house.

I cannot get up to give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. ⁹ "And I tell you,

We have Jesus' personal assurance so keep on asking, seeking, knocking... Since these verbs have no object, Jesus is not teaching what to pray for, but how to pray.

ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? ¹² Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? ¹³ If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give

Our Lord uses the example of human parenthood as a comparison to stress again the wonderful fact that God is our Father, for God's Fatherhood is the source of parenthood in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 3:15).

the holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

The loving Father now leads us gently to Himself through the action of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.