

28<sup>th</sup> July 2019 (17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 137(138):1-3,6-8; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-13.

### **'Abba!'**

Last week we witnessed Mary, the contemplative, sitting at Jesus' feet, absorbing his every word. In today's gospel, witnessing Jesus at prayer, the apostles ask him to continue teaching them – an us – about prayer. The gospel reading today teaches us what to pray for and how to be consistent in our prayers.

Mary's prayer of contemplation at the feet of Jesus is a very mature form of prayer. Mary sits at Jesus' feet trusting that God is aware of her needs, even before she opens her mouth in prayer. Her presence is enough. Still, Jesus instructs us what to look for in our relationship with God; what do we ask for.

The prayer we pray so often is a model of prayer and in itself a deep meditation. It is a prayer made up of a number of shorter prayers which remind us of what we need to pray for.

The first word in Jesus' prayer is perhaps the most important one, responding to the question of how to relate with God. Jesus refers to God using a very intimate term: abba! This is the term a young child uses to address his father: dad, or perhaps even daddy! The translation 'father' we use when we pray, and its equivalent in many languages, does not necessarily express the intimate tone intended in the original text. Later on, in today's reading, Jesus will compare God to a loving father who always provides what is good for his children. Jesus wants us to have a deep, intimate and childlike relationship with our God. God is not someone to be afraid of, but a father who looks after us and provides for all our needs.

Jesus wants us to beg God that his name be held holy by everyone and that his presence in our midst is always felt. We cannot pray that God's name become holy; God is holy in himself and nothing we do can take away his holiness. Our prayer is that we and those around us learn to recognise God's holiness and that we too 'become holy as God is holy!' God's holiness is our fulfilment and when we imitate God, we live up to the one in whose image and likeness we are created!

Similarly, we pray that we come to recognise God's presence in our midst. God is not a powerful king at the head of a kingdom, but a loving father we elect to follow. We choose to have God as our Lord, and we choose to accept his reign over us. We pray for ourselves firstly and then for those around us, that we accept God's will in our life; that we live as true disciples and children of God.

We then pray for our needs; like the people of Israel who needed to be provided with food on their journey towards the holy land, we too need to be fed, physically and spiritually. Abba, provide us with our daily needs so that we may have the strength to continue on our journey of discipleship. What is it that we need along this journey? What feeds us as we grow to love our Abba? We pray that we learn how to find nourishment in his word and in our encounter with the poor around us.

We also need to be forgiven. God always forgives us, and his forgiveness is not conditional on anything we do. God's forgiveness is an undeserved gift; nothing we do can gain us forgiveness! Yet, as a sign of being forgiven, and as a sign of having accepted God's forgiveness, we too need to forgive those who are around us. If we are not ready to forgive those who hurt us, then we will find it very difficult to accept and fully appreciate God's forgiveness.

Finally, we pray that God helps us not to fall into temptation. Recently Pope Francis reminded us that it is not God who leads us into temptation, but our own choices. Jesus invites us to pray that God protects us from ourselves and assists us to make the right choices so that we can always remain healthy and can always continue on our journey of discipleship.

Jesus invites us to pray without ceasing. A child will always run to his abba each time he needs anything. The child will not consider how many times he had been to his father with a request, he simply keeps running to his father, trusting that his father will give him what is good for him. We need this childlike attitude towards abba, always there to welcome us and to support us.

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