

17th Sunday per Annum - C
Genesis 18:20-32;
Colossians 2:12-14;
Luke 11:1-13
Little Flower - 7/24/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he taught them the *Our Father*. The Aramaic word Jesus used for father was *abba*, a word that signifies real intimacy between a father and a child. Prayer is our intimate conversation with God. The context of the *Our Father* in both Matthew and Luke reveals Jesus' understanding of prayer.

The *Our Father* is both brief and simple. Luke's version has five petitions; Matthew's has seven. In Matthew's Gospel, before introducing the *Our Father*, Jesus said, "*In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words.... Your Father knows what you need before you ask him*" [6:7-8]. However, in today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus suggests persistence in prayer and concludes: "*For everyone who asks, receives....*"

As Jesus said, we do not need to multiply words when we pray because God already knows what we need. Also, we are not trying to talk God into doing something that God does not want to do. If God knows what we need, why should we pray at all? Why should we be persistent in our prayer? When we pray and pray persistently, we acknowledge our dependence on God. We entrust ourselves to God.

However, our faith is often challenged when God does not seem to answer our prayers. In the final verse of today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*" In other words, God promises that he always answers our prayers with the greatest gift of all, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of his love.

Even more challenging is when we pray for God to heal a loved one from some illness or injury or to save someone from death, and the person is not healed and/or dies. When one of my former students was in neurocritical care after suffering a traumatic brain injury, another patient was a young man who had suffered a traumatic brain injury in a motorcycle accident. One Sunday his grandmother showed me the text of the homily her minister had preached concerning miracles.

Her minister suggested there are four kinds of miracles. First, there are physical miracles where God directly intervenes to heal someone or save them from death. These are the miracles we pray for. However, he said it is also a miracle when someone is healed or saved from death through modern medicine. God works through doctors, surgeons, and nurses. A third kind of miracle is the miracle of acceptance when someone is not healed or saved from death. Finally, the fourth kind of miracle is death itself. He argued that our passage from death to eternal life is an even greater miracle than physical healing.

My brothers and sisters, during this Jubilee of Mercy, the second to the last petition in Luke's *Our Father* deserves our special attention: "*...forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us....*" I would like to suggest that forgiveness is a fifth kind of miracle, whether God forgiving us, us forgiving others, others forgiving us, or us forgiving ourselves. Why? In the former Sacramentary, we prayed, "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in your unbounded mercy you have revealed the beauty of your power through your constant forgiveness of our sins. May the power of this love be in our hearts to bring your pardon and your kingdom to all we meet."