

17th Sunday per Annum - B
Genesis 18:20-32;
Colossians 2:12-14;
Luke 11:1-13
Little Flower - 7/28/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

When we listen to the Sunday readings at Mass, the big picture of their message is often very clear. However, unless we drill down and focus on certain words or phrases, we often miss important messages in the readings.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians reminds us how important baptism is in the economy of salvation. According to Paul, through baptism, we died, were buried, and rose with Christ. However, one of the most important phrases in the verse is "*through faith in the power of God.*"

Non-Catholic Christians often accuse Catholics of having a magical understanding of the seven sacraments. They believe that we believe that because sacraments actually give us the grace they signify, we receive the grace automatically. However, this verse suggests that baptism is only life giving if we have faith. Of course, we only receive baptism once. However, because we receive the Eucharist every time we attend Mass, we run the risk of receiving the Eucharist with little thought or faith.

Today's reading from Genesis is also interesting. Abraham bargained with God over Sodom and Gomorrah not once but six times. Finally, God promised not to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten good people were living there. Today's reading gives us an insight into an authentic encounter with God. I think most of believe that if we were to encounter God, we would be in such wonder and awe that we would be overwhelmed and speechless. Abraham certainly was not overwhelmed.

God wants to enter into a real relationship with us. God want us to be a real partner in the relationship. God wants to meet us where we are. An authentic experience of God should actually give us confidence. In other words, Abraham was able to bargain with God because he knew he was in God's presence and God loved him. In any authentic relationship, the partners are able to ask for what they need and want in the relationship. The same is true in our relationship with God. We need to ask God for what we need and want.

Finally, today's Gospel presents Luke's version of the Our Father. Luke's version has five petitions; Matthew's has seven. One of the beauties of the Our Father is its simplicity. However, because we all pray the Our Father so often, I sometimes fear that we do not think about what we are praying. Today then I want to briefly reflect on the last three petitions in Luke's Our Father.

In the second part of the prayer, we pray that God will give us our daily bread, in the sense of everything we need. Just as God provided manna in the desert one day at a time, we are expressing confidence that God will provide what we need on a daily basis. We then ask to be forgiven as we forgive others. We are asking God to forgive us only to the extent that we are willing to forgive others. Finally, we pray not to be subjected to the final test. Because all of us are weak and sinful, we never know how we will react to temptation. Therefore, we ask God to be kept free from temptation.

My brothers and sisters, in the second half of the Gospel, Jesus calls us to be persistent in prayer as Abraham was in the first reading. However, the most significant verse is the final verse: "*how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?*" Jesus does not promise to always give us what we want. Rather he is promising us that when we pray, he will always give us the gift of his love. Perhaps, there is even a practical message in this. When we are unable to give someone what he or she is asking for, at least we can let the person know we love and care for him or her.