

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church. Houston, Texas
27 July 2025

Luke 11:1-13

A famous poet was once asked, "What is happiness?" After a few seconds of silence, he said, "To me happiness is to be at peace with God, with myself and with humanity, to know that I am forgiven, and to have a cup of tea whenever I want one". This very simple answer is in fact filled with wisdom. This is what the most famous prayer in the Bible asks for: peace with God, our daily bread, forgiveness and protection. The *Our Father* is a significant prayer in the life of the Church and in our spiritual journey. We often say the words without thinking about their meaning and their full implications. We must rediscover the words of this amazing prayer and familiarize ourselves anew with its theology.

Let us set the proper context for this teaching. Luke uses the word *Prayer* more than any other Gospel. Jesus is praying at his baptism before the heavens open and he hears the voice of God giving testimony about him, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased. (Lk 3:22). Jesus spends the night praying to God before selecting the twelve apostles (Lk 6:12). Later, Jesus is praying before he asks the disciples, "Who do the crowds/you say that I am?" (Lk 9:18). Before the event of the Transfiguration, Jesus is praying on the mountain (Lk 9:28-29). In the passage for today, Jesus is praying before the disciples ask him to teach them to pray as John has taught his disciples (Lk 11:1). Later we will see Jesus praying in the Mount of Olives before he is handed over to the authorities (Lk 22:40-45). And lastly, on the moment of his death Jesus prayed for his torturers, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). In Luke, Jesus is a man of prayer. He is the only evangelist who gives us three very important parables about prayer: "The Friend at Midnight" (Lk 11:5-8), which we read today; "The Widow and the Judge" (Lk 18:1-8); and "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector" (Lk 18:9-14). Prayer is important to Luke because prayer is important to Jesus.

The version of the *Our Father* Luke gives us is different from the version of Matthew in many ways, but his prayer is a powerful theological statement about who God is. The prayer starts by affirming that God is our Father. We don't pray to a God who is distant, isolated from humanity, and in another dimension. This God we pray to is a parent who loves us and who seeks to have a relationship with us, the beloved children. Next, the prayer asks that God's name be glorified. We say, "hallowed it be your name." God is the only one who can glorify or make the

Divine name holy. We fail to love God with all our hearts, souls, and might. We betray God by worshipping material creatures rather than the Creator of the universe. The prayer seeks to restore this imbalance. We say, "God we are unable to glorify your name the way we should glorify it. Help us to make your name holy. Help us to give you the honor, the glory, the respect and the love you deserve. Help us to be at peace with you."

The prayer then asks that God's Kingdom may become a reality on earth soon. May this kingdom of justice and mercy become a reality here as it is in heaven. Humanity needs a reality in which we treat each other with the love and compassion God has shown us; a kingdom where brotherly and sisterly love are more important than financial gains, the bottom line, advancement in the corporate ladder, or being politically correct. A kingdom where there is no poor, no hungry, and no stranger. We cry out, "May your Kingdom come and may your will be done. May we finally realize that Christianity is not something we do but a loving relationship with you, and a gift we accept from you. We have done our will for far too long with horrendous consequences. It is time for your will to be done. It is time for you to reign!"

It is only after we pray that "God's name be holy", "God's kingdom may become a reality", and "God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven" that the *Our Father* moves to petitions about ourselves. And it starts with the basic necessities of life. We say, "Give us this day our daily bread". Provide for us what we need daily to sustain our lives. Give us today and each day food and drink. It does not ask, "Allow me to live better than my neighbor." It does not say, "Lord, help me to keep up with the Joneses". It does not say, "Lord, won't you give me a Mercedes Benz?" as Janice Chaplain would sing. Perhaps this is the reason why so many prayers go unanswered.

Theologians believe that "unanswered prayer" is one of the reasons why people get discouraged in their faith and give up or drop out of church. They feel a sense of failure in their prayer life. I believe we seldom know how to pray. "Prayer must be more than an emergency magical lamp rubbed in a crisis. The truth is that many people give up on prayer because they never understand what prayer is. Much that passes for prayer is irrational, superstitious, and self-centered, and is therefore unworthy of the pattern of the prayer that Jesus offered to us his disciples" (James W. Moore, Sermon: "Encounters With Christ".) After asking for our daily bread, the prayer asks for forgiveness, "Forgive us our sins, as we continue to forgive our debtors". What do we need more than anything else in the world? We need forgiveness, compassion and understanding. We need a God who is not appalled by our sin and our depravity and who is always quick to be merciful

and to love us all the way to the cross. We need to be forgiven, and we need to forgive others who have offended us. We need to experience the freedom that comes from letting go of our resentments, our hatred, our wounds, and our hurts. Even though forgiveness is difficult, the *Our Father* acknowledges that for those who wish to forgive, God will in time give them the ability to do so.

After forgiveness, the prayer asks for deliverance from temptation. We are constantly bombarded by temptation, trials and anxiety. The prayer acknowledges that we need the strength of the Holy Spirit to live sanely in an insane world. We need God's aid to stay firm in our faith in a world that is vastly becoming more secular. Our lives are often fragmented, and we are pulled in many directions by the demands of our world. Like Martha, we are worried about many different things. The prayer acknowledges this reality and asks for God's intervention in helping us to reduce our anxiety; and to avoid temptations, such as the temptation to give up our faith when things get difficult, to lose hope when we don't immediately see the results of our prayer, and to fall into escapism and addiction.

Lastly, the prayer asks that God may deliver us from all evil. This is a global or cosmic evil and not just a spiritual or psychological evil. May God protect us from the evil of others, as well as from our own propensity for evil. May God keep us from hatred, envy, malice, gluttony, avarice, laziness, gossip, idolatry, betrayal, etc. May God keep us safe from natural disasters, political corruption, crime, unemployment, bankruptcy, etc. May God keep us safe from hopelessness, helplessness, interpersonal conflict, lack of imagination and creativity, inability to dream and envision, etc. In other words, may God keep us safe from all evil, spiritual, natural, physical, and emotional.

The *Our Father* is an absolutely comprehensive, yet amazingly simple prayer. We need to pray it regularly because God answers prayer. But we must pray sensibly, asking God for those things that are truly important to sustain our lives and our faith. I invite us today to pray confidently, knowing in advance that our God is a loving parent who will provide for us much more than we deserve. Let us pray in season and out of season because in prayer we affirm that we depend on God's mercy and love. Only God has the answer to what afflicts the human condition, and life is not about us, but about Christ in us.

May God continue to bless our prayer life. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!