

17th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (July 24, 2022)

We all know how important communication is maintaining and strengthening our relationships with those we love—family members, friends, and others. That is even more true when it comes to our relationship with God, and prayer is at the heart of our communication with God—our ‘speaking’ to God, as it were, and hearing and acting on what God says to us. In the gospel Jesus responded to the disciples’ request for a lesson in prayer by teaching them the Lord’s Prayer—the Our Father. Luke’s version, heard today, is more compact than the more familiar version we know from Matthew’s gospel, but it is still the prayer that Jesus taught.

We all know the Lord’s Prayer; it is one of the very first prayers we all learned as children. And maybe we know it too well—we can rattle it off so fast and may not even think about what we are saying. And that would be a shame because it is such a powerful prayer and is indeed a radical prayer. ‘Radical’ comes from a Latin word meaning ‘root’, and the Our Father certainly gets at the root of our necessary relationship with God. One of the very best reflections I have ever read on this prayer comes from a Catholic youth magazine several years ago—it is in the form of a dialogue between God and a young man who is ‘saying his prayers’. I’m going to try to use two different voices—one indicating God, and the other the young man. See if you do not find yourself in that young man’s position a time or two...

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN—**Yes?** Don’t interrupt me. I’m praying. **But you called me.** Called you? I didn’t call you. I’m praying “Our Father, who art in heaven—**“There, you did it again.** Did what? **Called me. You said “Our Father, who art in Heaven.” Here I am. What’s on your mind?** But I didn’t mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my daily prayers. It makes me feel good; kind of like getting a duty done. **All right. Go on!**

HALLOWED BE THY NAME--**Hold it. What do you mean by that?** By what? **“Hallowed be thy name.”** It means—it means—I don’t know what it means. How should I know? It’s just part of the prayer. By the way, what does it mean? **It means honored, holy, wonderful.** Hey, that makes sense. I never thought what ‘hallowed’ meant before.

THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. **Do you really mean that?** Sure, why not? **What are you doing about it?** Doing? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be kinda neat if You got control of everything down here, like You do up there. **Have I got control of you?** Well, I go to church. **That isn’t what I asked you. What about that habit of lust you have? And that bad temper? You’ve really got a problem there, you know. And then there’s the way you spend your money—all on yourself. And what about the kind of books you read?** Stop picking on me. I’m just as good as some of the rest of those phonies who go to church. **Excuse me. I thought you were praying for My will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it.** Oh, all right I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others. **So could I...** Look Lord, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer that it usually does.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD—**You need to cut out the bread. You’re overweight as it is.** Hey, wait a minute! What is this? “Criticize me day?” **Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That’s what I’m trying to get across to you. You called Me, and here I am. Keep on praying. I’m interested in the next part of your prayer—well, go on.** I’m scared to. **Scared? Of what?** I know what You will say. **Try Me and see.**

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US. **What about Bill?** See, I knew it. I knew you would bring him up. Lord, he’s told lies about me. He never paid back that money he owed me. I have reason to get even with him. **But your prayer. What**

about your prayer? I didn't mean it. Well, at least you're honest. But it's not fun carrying that load of bitterness around inside, is it? No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even. You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you already are. But I can change all that. You can? How? Forgive Bill. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Bill's problem and not yours. You may lose the money, but you will have settled your heart. But Lord, I can't forgive Bill. Then I can't forgive you. Oh, you're right. You always are. (Sigh) All right. All right. I'll forgive him. Help him to find the right road in life, Lord. He's bound to be awfully miserable... Someway, somehow, show him the right way. You're not through with your prayer. Go on. Oh, all right.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. Good, good. I'll do just that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted. What do you mean by that? Quit hanging around the magazine stands where Playboy is sold. Change some of your friendships. Some of your so-called friends are beginning to get to you. They'll have you completely involved in the wrong things. Don't be fooled. They say they're having fun, but for you, it would be ruin. Don't use Me as an escape hatch. I don't understand. Sure you do. You've done it a lot of times. You get caught in a bad situation. You get in trouble and then you come running to me. "Lord, help me out of this mess and I'll promise you I'll never do it again." You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me? Yes, and I'm ashamed, Lord, really I am. Which bargain are you remembering? Well, when the woman next door saw me backing away from the neighborhood bar. I'd told my mother I was going to the store. I remember telling You, "Oh, God, don't let her tell my mother where I've been. I promise I'll be in church every Sunday." She didn't tell your mother, but you didn't keep your promise, did you? I'm sorry, Lord, I really am. Up until now I thought if I just prayed the Our Father every day, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen the way it did... Now that some of these old sins are exposed and out of the way, well, there's no telling what we can do together. Lord, let's see what we can make of me, okay? Yes, let's see.

Like I said before: this is one of the best reflections of prayer, especially the Lord's Prayer, that I have ever seen. And the author is spot on when he has God say to the young man: "Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know." That is the kind of danger we should not be scared of...unless we are scared of being shaken out of our comfort zones. If prayer for us is just mouthing some words we learned as children and trying to get done as quickly as possible, then it won't do much if anything for us. But if we are sincerely seeking and praying to know and do what God wants of us, then He will take us at our word—and we will be changed, because we will allow Him to make us more like His Son Jesus. And that, may we never forget, is what this life is fundamentally all about. Are we willing to take that risk??