

Ninth Sunday after Trinity
July 28, 2013
Homily for the Anglican Use Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 11:1-13

Last week I talked to you about Martha and Mary and the necessity of following Mary's example of sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His teaching. I reminded you that a portion of our prayer life must be dedicated to silence, in the same way we have stretches of silence at Mass, in order that we may hear what the Lord is saying to us. In our Gospel today we hear what we should say to God during our prayers when we are not silent.

Jesus tells us first to praise God. You notice that every Mass begins with a hymn or the introit appointed for the day. Both of these serve the purpose of beginning our prayers with the praise God is due and with which Jesus tells us we must begin. Therefore, in our private devotions we, too, must begin by praising the God who made us, redeemed us, and by the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. God is due praise before we say anything else to Him, and this requirement that Jesus lays down serves to keep us mindful of how we ought to orient ourselves to God. That is, God is great without reference to anything He has ever done for us or anyone else. He is simply great. We love Him for who He is, not what He has done for us.

It is because of God's essential greatness that we then move immediately to appeal for His Kingdom. What is more important than the fulfillment of any of our individual or corporate needs is the establishment of God's universal rule over all creation for all eternity. For Blessed John Henry Newman, the famous theologian and convert to the Faith from Anglicanism, mention in the Bible of the Kingdom of God was to be heard as synonymous with the Church. Thus, when we pray for the Kingdom to come, we are also praying for the establishment of Christ's Church in every corner of the globe. The Church is, for now, God's Kingdom on earth, but we see at the same time that not every heart is subject to the Church. We pray, then, that this will soon be the case, as surely as we pray that Jesus will come again to judge both the living and the dead and establish by force what for now people may voluntarily submit to. Our praise of God's greatness flows naturally and seamlessly then into a spoken desire that all will recognize that greatness.

Only after we praise God and pray for His Kingdom to come, do we begin to ask for things for ourselves. And notice that when we do ask for our daily bread, we do so in the first person plural: "Give us each day our daily bread." The prayer here is not merely for our personal sustenance, as if God's providence were directed primarily at meeting my individual necessities. The prayer instead is to the Father of all for the providence of all. So in a sense, here we are praying for all those who do not have sense enough to pray for themselves. We are asking that God send His rain upon the just and the unjust, upon the righteous and the unrighteous.

Now as Christians we also recognize this petition to be related to the daily bread from heaven, the Holy Eucharist, by which the Church is fed and the world is sanctified. But even here we must recognize that the daily celebration of the Mass does not only benefit those who believe. We are praying, as I said last week, for the most important thing of all. We are praying that the Mass continue to be celebrated in order that the earth may still run its proper course. Here we recall the famous quote of St. Pio of Pietrelcino: "It would be easier for the earth to exist without the sun than without the Holy Sacrifice of

the Mass.” We aren’t just praying here for our daily bread, but for that which sustains our neighbors—friends and enemies alike. We are asking that we get what we need and that others do too, even if it is only so they have time to repent.

Moving on from what God offers through His Church to sustain the world, we ask for the forgiveness of our sins. Again we note that the formula Jesus gives us is in the first person plural. For our individual sins to be forgiven we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which I commend to you and offer ample opportunity for you to receive. But in this prayer that Jesus gives us, we are to ask for the forgiveness of our sins, that is, the sins of the whole world. In the same way we petition God for the daily bread of our neighbors, so we ask Him to forgive their sins along with our own. Our connection to our fellow man cannot be forgotten or ignored, and we see in this petition yet another request for the flourishing of Christ’s Church, which is the means by which sins are forgiven. Without Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross, there can be neither daily bread nor forgiveness, but it is precisely through the Church that we receive these benefits; so these petitions too are connected to our pleas for the coming of the Kingdom.

At the same time, our agency is not neglected. We conclude this particular petition for forgiveness to our own willingness to forgive others. The forgiveness we receive proceeds in part from the forgiveness we offer. Here then is the explicit reference to charity, to the love by which others will know we are followers of the God Who is love. God’s love will blossom in the world through our participation in that love, insofar as we unite ourselves to the sacrifice Christ first made on Calvary. In other words, our prayer is not only that God will bless us, but that we will bless God.

Finally, we pray that we be preserved from temptation. God does not tempt anyone, this we know; but He does allow us to be tempted. In this petition we implore that the tempter be restrained. Just as we pray at the end of Mass the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, that we will be defended in battle, so in the Lord’s Prayer we pray for victory in our spiritual warfare. Nor do we pray only for ourselves, but that we not be led. Since we are praying even for those who have no faith at all, we see the extent to which temptation is invited, how too many of our neighbors turn against the strength our prayers would give them in order to participate in wickedness.

Here we see the context for that discouraging line at the end of today’s Gospel, when Jesus tells us we are evil, yet know how to give good gifts to our children. Too often we are focused entirely on ourselves, concerned more with our desires than with the glory of God and the needs of our neighbors, who need both their daily bread and forgiveness. Too often we are led to temptation just thinking about our needs. But Jesus assures us our prayers are answered, and He has given us the Our Father as a corrective. The very grammar of the Lord’s Prayer tells us, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”