

**Homily For Tuesday of the First Week of Lent - Year II**  
**St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - Tuesday, February 20, 2024**

**Matthew 6: 7-15** "Your Father knows what you need before you ask. Pray in this way: Our Father ..."

**Psalm 34:3-18** "I sought the Lord and he delivered me from all my fears."

**Isaiah 55:10-11** "My word will not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that for which I sent it."

**Not In Vain Must We Pray**

**Introduction**

My 94 year old mother is very hard of hearing and has, at least for the present, lost her hearing aids. I notice when visiting her that, when other people speak to her, most of the time I have to repeat what they say so she can hear and understand. Besides the volume and the clarity of speaking, the other thing needed to communicate well is using fewer words. More words makes poorer hearing. Now my mother frequently points out that I use too many words. That aside, even ordinary human communication requires simplicity and clarity.

**Matthew**

When children talk to their parents, they do not resort to complicated reasoning, nor to using a lot of words, but they simply ask for what they need. To pray is not so much to inform God, but to ask him simply for all we need. He already knows what we need even before you ask Him. That's what Jesus says in today's Gospel passage. In this light, prayer is the children talking to their parents who love them.

Jesus begins his teaching on the simplicity of prayer by critiquing the way the Gentiles pray. This is unusual because he usually targets fellow Jews who misunderstand the God who revealed himself in so many ways to Israel. He says the Gentiles heap up empty phrases. The gods of the nations are no gods at all. They cannot hear. Those who worship them, in a vain attempt to be heard, believe that they must talk louder and use more words. Jesus is directing his followers to stop trying to manipulate or bully God. Instead, turn your hearts to him. Pour out your hearts to him. That's what the Father wants, our hearts.

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, they are not really looking for words. They already had those. They had the psalms and the Torah and the words of the prophets. What the disciples wanted was what Jesus had with the Father when he went off to pray. They wanted that intimacy he had with the Father.

The Our Father - The Lord's Prayer some call it - is the simple and complete prayer that Jesus gives us. It does not mean that other prayers are no good. It means that this prayer contains everything. The Church Fathers for centuries all wrote detailed commentaries on what the petitions of the Our Father contain.

Our Father in heaven: This is how it starts. This is recognition of God's authority. This puts us in right relationship as we begin the prayer.

Your kingdom come: Jesus proclaimed that kingdom everywhere and in every way, for those who were ready to receive it.

On earth as it is in heaven: The uniting of heaven and earth under God's dominion was the purpose for which the Saviour came. This would not be a military victory but a sanctification - making holy - the world God had already created out of love. This was the holiness which was lost in the garden and which Christ came to restore.

Daily bread: Asking anything more than what we truly need in this moment is a kind of ambition that is not of God. That was the first sin, to want something that they already had, to be like God and, second to want more than the perfect existence of the garden, harmony and intimacy with God. Of course, daily bread is also an image of the Eucharistic bread. This was spoken of in all of the early writings.

Forgiveness: We can only receive from God in the measure we are willing to give to others. It's not that God's forgiveness is conditional. It is that forgiveness, by its nature, requires that we make our hearts ready to receive that forgiveness. Consider the confiteor at the beginning of mass. We say this prayer to make ourselves ready to receive the Bread of Life.

After the Our Father, Jesus goes back to forgiveness. God has forgiven us a great debt. That should make us ready to forgive others on the basis of how much we have been forgiven. We can't experience the freedom and the intimacy with God that forgiveness offers until we let go of unforgiveness.

## **Isaiah**

From the Gospels, it is very clear that Jesus IS the Word of God that is spoken of in Isaiah. It is the Father who gives us Jesus to be our daily bread. He IS God's plan of salvation, who would come down from heaven, like the rain upon the earth, to restore us to intimacy with the Father after it was lost. He does not fail. He keeps the Father's promise that his word will produce fruit. He would not return to the Father until he had accomplished that purpose for which he became one of us.

Deuteronomy 8 declares: "He humbled you to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." That's what Jesus quoted to the devil who suggested that Jesus make bread from stones.

God's word has now been sent in its fullness. That's Jesus. It becomes seed to the sower. Both are Jesus. It becomes bread to the eater. That's Jesus in the Eucharist. It will accomplish that for which he sent it. That is the salvation of the world.

## **Call To Conversion**

We know that today, we are amongst fewer and fewer people who are listening to Word of God. But we can have confidence that God's plan will not be thwarted, that just as the rain falls and waters the earth so it can produce fruit, his Word will succeed. The psalmist tells us that our words to him, our simple prayer, will not be in vain.

As we contemplate today the first of the three Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, let us seek intimacy with our God with the deepest desire of our hearts for today's daily bread for our souls.

## **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *O Lord, you have been our refuge, from generation to generation. From age to age, you are.*

**Collect:** *Lord, grant that through the chastening effects of bodily discipline, our minds may be radiant with our yearning for you.*

**Isaiah:** *Thus says the Lord, your God: For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth. so shall my word not return to me empty, but it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

**Psalms:** *I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant. Never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The Lord is near to the broken hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.*

**Gospel Acclamation:** *No one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*

**Matthew:** *Jesus began to teach the disciples: "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.' If you forgive others your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

**Offertory Prayer:** *Receive, O Creator, almighty God, what we bring from your bountiful goodness.*

**Final Prayer:** *Grant us through these mysteries, Lord, that by moderating earthly desires we may learn to love the things of heaven.*