

Homily-Prayer In The Gospel of Luke

Over the past year we have heard the Gospel of Luke proclaimed in the liturgy. The Gospel of Luke is often called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit has a central place both in the Gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles, which was also written by St. Luke. The Gospel of Luke can be called the Gospel of Justice as the Gospel often focuses on Jesus' ministry to outcasts. Many have referred to the central role of Mary in the Gospel. In addition to each of these themes, the Gospel of Luke is also the Gospel of Prayer.

To prepare for this homily I reviewed the various references to prayer in the Gospel of Luke. I have chosen seven lessons on prayer which are found in the Gospel of Luke. My homily will focus on those seven lessons.

The first lesson comes from the Gospel reading we have just heard. **The first lesson is to pray persistently.**

In the Gospel there is a widow who wants an unjust judge to do her justice against her adversary. In the time of Jesus widows had little power as society was patriarchal. This widow publicly complains to a judge who respects neither God nor humans. The judge finally gives in as the widow wears him down. The parable does not compare God with the judge in order to say that we must constantly pray to God in order to be heard. It does not say that God demands that we wait until he answers our prayers. The reading contrasts God with the judge. . If a powerless widow can break down a corrupt judge through her persistence alone, how much more can we expect God, the merciful and just judge, will hear our prayers and answer them if we persist. Whereas the judge waited in giving justice to the widow, God speedily gives us justice. God hears and answers our prayers. Therefore we are to persistently pray to this God who in his love and mercy answers our prayers.

The Gospel calls us to pray day and night. This says that we are to be a people of constant prayer. Our lives are to be a prayer. We are to offer all in our lives to God and we are to live out the will of God so completely that our life itself is a prayer. We are to put ourselves in the presence of God each day. This does not mean that we are not to pray formal prayers but that formal and spontaneous prayer are to constantly be prayed to God.

The second lesson is that we are to pray before important events and before we make important decisions.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is shown praying before his baptism, before he chooses the 12 apostles, before the confession of Peter at Cesaria Philippi, before the Transfiguration, before the giving of the Our Father, before his passion and death and even on the cross. While on the cross Jesus prayed for those who crucified him and his final sentence was a prayer, "Into your hands I entrust my Spirit." In the same way we

are to constantly pray before we make major decisions. We are to not only consult with friends and business associates before we make decisions but we are to pray to God.

The third lesson that we learn about prayer from the Gospel of Luke is that God is our Father.

When asked how to pray by his disciples, Jesus provides a prayer which begins with the word "Father." When we pray we are to understand that the God to whom we pray is al our loving and merciful Father. God is not an absent Father but instead a Father who always hears and answers our prayers. God is a Father who cares for us and protects us.

The fourth lesson is that we are to pray for the coming of the kingdom.

The Our Father which we will pray together after the Eucharistic prayer is a prayer for the coming of the kingdom. This is true not only for the version that we receive from St. Matthew which is a part of the Mass but also for the version from St. Luke. Jesus presented God as a king of love who is over a universal kingdom of love. In the words, healing and forgiveness of Jesus the kingdom of God began to be established in the world. God continues to establish His kingdom in the world. While it is God who establishes the kingdom, He establishes that kingdom through our lives. Jesus asks us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom. When we pray the Our Father we pray for the coming of the kingdom

The fifth lesson is that we are to pray for God's forgiveness of our sins and for the strength to forgive those who sin against us.

In the Our Father we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we too forgive all who do us wrong (Luke 11:4)." In Luke's version of the Our Father we learn that we are to pray for God's forgiveness of our sins. We ask God to forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. In this prayer we commit to forgiving others. The Our Father teaches us that we are not only to ask for God's forgiveness of our sins but also for the strength to forgive those who hurt us. Who is that individual or those individuals that we need to forgive. Before we pray the Lord's Prayer in this Mass we should ask ourselves whether we are ready to forgive.

The sixth lesson of prayer is to listen.

In the Gospel of Luke we have the story of Mary and Martha who welcome Jesus into their home as he travels to Jerusalem. In the story Martha is worried and anxious about her efforts to serve the Lord. Mary her sister merely sits at the feet of Jesus and listens. The story teaches us that we, like Mary, are called to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his word. We are doing that in this Mass. We are also called to sit at the feet of Jesus when we pray and listen to his word. When we pray we are to silently listen to Jesus. It

is often more comfortable to tell Jesus what we need we are also called to sit at the feet of Jesus and merely listen. It is than that we experience the love of God.

The seventh lesson is that we are to give thanks in prayer.

When Mary visits Elizabeth she prays, “My soul extols the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” Mary has experienced the love and grace of God in her life and so she rejoices in God her savior. We likewise are to give thanks and rejoice in the ways that God works in our lives. We are to give thanks to God at all times. This is true in the good times when we can easily see and experience the goodness of God in our lives. At the same time we are to give thanks to God in times of trial and suffering. It is in these times in which we most need to give thanks as in these times we most need to discern God’s place in our lives. God is with us always both in the good times and in the bad.

These lessons of prayer from the Gospel of Luke teach us that we are to pray persistently without losing heart. The challenge to pray always can open for us a habit of prayer that encompasses our entire life. We are to pray before the most important decisions in our lives to a God who is a loving Father. Our prayer is to be for the coming of God’s kingdom of love and for the strength so that we can forgive those who hurt us. Our prayer is to be characterized by both listening and giving thanks.