

17th Sunday - Power of Prayer

Lord, teach us to pray! Why? Because we need to be taught, it is not something caught – it just doesn't happen. God can teach us to pray in multiple ways. Saint John Paul, for example, a powerhouse of prayer who changed the landscape of the world and brought down the walls of communism in Eastern Europe, claims it was his own father's daily example of prayer that inspired him to become a priest. Who inspires you to pray? And what is prayer? Prayer is conversing with God, says St Teresa of Avila, Spanish mystic and Doctor of the Church. What are the kinds of prayer? As every Josephite sister did say, think of the word SALT, as an acronym of the four ways of prayer: S for sorrow, A for asking, L for love (or praise) and T for thanksgiving. We are meant to utilise all four forms of prayer. But some seem to excel only in the asking version. In the Mass, the greatest prayer given by God to us mere mortals we can easily identify these four kinds of prayer. The penitential rite is clearly one of repentance or sorrow; the Gloria one of praise; the general intercessions one of petition or asking; lastly, the eucharistic prayer is clearly one of thanksgiving - the meaning of the word in Greek. In light of the term salt, we note that in the first reading about Sodom and Gomorrah, we find ourselves at the salt lake or Dead Sea in Palestine. Some geographical claim that it is the lowest place on earth being a place of much fire and brimstone, where Abraham employed in utmost the prayer of petition to save the city, but to no avail. Others claim that his mode of petitioning, not unlike enterprise bargaining ploys today, was wanting on account of their moral depravity.

In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us the only prayer written in heaven for us to pray on earth – the Lord's prayer. Although this English translation varies from the official text used in Mass, the essential parts are present in the original Greek text. Often we take this prayer for granted because we have prayed it all our lives, but we should stop today and analyse its structure and content. After all, the Catechism of the Church, dedicates a significant portion in its fourth part to this prayer (nos 2761-2865). There are three things we should know about God's prayer; i). there are seven parts: three for God, four for us; ii). the first three parts align with the three theological virtues: faith, hope, charity; iii). the last four parts refer to the four cardinal virtues; prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance.

1. Our Father who art in Heaven hallowed (holy) be thy Name (**faith** helps us call God Holy).
2. Thy Kingdom come (hope causes us to desire God's Kingdom - the eternal Church in Heaven).
3. Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven. (via **love** we will do His will: keep the 10 Commandments.)
4. Give Us this day our daily bread; (**prudence** sustains and guides us each day - but only for the day)
5. and forgive Us our trespasses, as we forgive those (being **just** means to forgive others)
6. and lead Us not into temptation; (**temperance** helps us to control ourselves & avoid evil people ...)
7. but deliver Us from evil. (**courage** enables us to fight temptations). Here is a good explanation by [Fr Tierney](#).

The last section of the Gospel today refers to perseverance in prayer. We must be consistent or faithful to our daily prayers and never give up. God always hears our prayer but may not choose to answer them in this life or as we wish. Lastly, prayer can be divided into three levels: vocal, meditative, contemplative. At Mass, we pray the words in a vocal manner. At Adoration we meditate on divine mysteries in silence. The highest level of prayer is when God intervenes and contemplative prayer becomes mystical, of which there are several degrees.

One exceptional master of mystical prayer, whose feast day is this week, was St Ignatius of Loyola, sixteenth century author of the spiritual exercises, renowned for discerning spirits and forming the soul to accomplish God's will. Though he learnt it the hard way – one might say. Ignatius born in 1491 in the Basque region of Spain, is a pivotal figure in the history of the Catholic Church. At the age of 16, he embarked on a promising career at the Spanish royal court, surrounding himself with power and prestige. However, his life took a dramatic turn during the Battle of Pamplona in 1521, where as a knight he sustained severe leg injuries. This moment of crisis became a turning point, leading him to confront his ambitions and desires for worldly success. During his recovery, Ignatius experienced his first conversion when he had access to only a few books given to him by his sister-in-law—one about the life of Jesus and another about the saints. As he read these texts, he began to reflect deeply on his life choices and previous ambitions. Ignatius found himself dreaming about a life dedicated to God, contrasting his past pursuits of fame and fortune with the allure of spiritual fulfillment. This internal struggle marked the beginning of his journey toward a deeper faith.

Ignatius' second conversion occurred as he grappled with feelings of unworthiness and guilt over his past. After a period of intense spiritual turmoil, which he referred to as experiencing "scruples," he sought solace and guidance. This led him to a cave near Manresa, where he spent significant time in prayer and reflection. It was here that he experienced a profound spiritual awakening, sensing a direct connection to God. Ignatius emerged from this experience with clarity about his purpose: to serve God and others. Central to Ignatian spirituality is the concept of discernment, the ability to differentiate between various internal movements of the spirit. By developing a keen awareness of these movements, one can make informed choices that align with God's will. After years of contemplation and spiritual development, Ignatius decided to dedicate his life to God. He studied at the University of Paris, where he met future companions Francis Xavier and Peter Faber. Together, with others they founded the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, in 1540, aiming to reform the Church and serve the needs of the world through education and missionary work. Such is the fruit of the power of prayer.