

Teach Us, Too, to Pray
Luke 11:1-13

In the Gospel according to St. Luke, Jesus' disciples ask Him to explain many things, especially the meaning of His parables, but throughout the entire Gospel there is only one time they come to Him to request that He teach them something. It is in our Gospel reading for today: "Lord, teach us to pray." And we, who are not of His chosen Twelve but who also yearn to pray as our Lord would have us pray, lean a little closer to the text, adding our own quiet supplication, "Yes, Lord. Teach us."

As Christians, we know what it is to pray. "As soon as a Christian has been justified by faith and thus become God's child, he begins to commune with God." (Pieper, III, 76) This communication with God is called prayer, no matter what form it takes. Some prayers are led by others, while we stand in reverence and humility, heads down, hearts united. Some are read from the page, or recited from memory. Some prayers are more wept than said. Some are formal, some are famous, and some cannot be prayed without recalling the person who was the first to pray them. Some are breathtakingly eloquent, while others contain no words at all, only the heart's desire for God, inarticulate terror or grief or longing which need to be interpreted by the Holy Spirit. Not every conversation with our heavenly Father needs to be formal, any more our every conversation with our earthly father will be. Yet we know that not everything that might pop into our heads is automatically going to be prayer acceptable to God. Lord, teach not only Your disciples gathered around You, but teach us also. You have called us to be Your own, and bought us at a bitter price. If it is Your will, Lord, teach us, too, to pray.

As the Son of God begins to tell His Disciples how they can talk to His Father, we are relieved that this instruction is not only for the Twelve He called or the Seventy-Two He sent. These are words for us as well. We recognize the pattern and the themes of this prayer. It is nearly identical to the prayer He gave to the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount, the prayer we call The Lord's Prayer. It's shorter, here, leading us to suspect that it is not a specific formula of words that Jesus is giving us so much as it is instruction on the attitude of prayer. As in the Lord's Prayer, these three attitudes are to form the backbone of our prayers:

Know God, rejoice in what He provides you, and depend on His grace.

In the middle of WWII, Great Britain's ambassador to the US was the famous Oxford don Isaiah Berlin, widely recognized to this day as one of the most influential political thinkers of the 20th century. From the time he graduated from Oxford, he taught at Oxford, and he did so for his entire professional life, except for his wartime appointment to America. Beginning in 1942, Ambassador Berlin had been sending weekly reports from Washington to Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Knowing that he would have to fly to the United States to meet with President Roosevelt, Churchill thought he might be able to arrange a working lunch with the ambassador. The American government officials were happy to make all the arrangements, and even offered press coverage of the event, an offer which Churchill's people declined. Churchill was already seated when the invited guest was shown into the room. Formal introductions were made. "Mr. Prime Minister, may I present to you Mr. Berlin. Mr. Berlin, may I introduce to you the Prime Minister of England." The meal commenced, with Churchill dominating the conversation, expressing his appreciation for all Berlin's work and waxing eloquent on how eagerly he looks forward to every new work to which he put his pen. It was only when the Prime Minister leaned back in his chair and asked, "So, how long do you think this war will go on?" that it was discovered that the luncheon guest was in fact not Isaiah Berlin at all, but lyricist Irving Berlin; you know..."God Bless America," "White Christmas," "Putting on the Ritz." You have to know who you are talking to before you know what you can properly ask him.

Know God. Know Him not as a shadow, but as Father. Jesus called Him Father, and invites us to do the same. Speak to Him as a loving child would speak to a loving father. And if your own family history complicates that picture, if your father was not loving, or if you were not a child who spoke lovingly to your father, see God as the Father your father should have been, as His Holy Spirit makes you the child you should have been. The disciples might wonder, "How do we speak to a Father we have never seen?" But in fact, when in a different conversation, the disciples said, "Show us the Father, that we might know Him," Jesus answered, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father." Talk to Him, Jesus is saying, like you would talk to Me.

Know God, rejoice in what He provides you, and depend on His grace. The structure of our prayer is to be very like the structure of our Christian life. This is no great surprise, since we know from our Lutheran Catechism and from the Bible itself that the whole life of the Christian is to be a life of prayer. We desire that those around us would honor the name of our God,

we pray for this to happen and rejoice when it is so. His name would be hallowed and His kingdom would come whether we pray for it or not, but our prayer is that it might be so among us also.

“Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”
God keeps giving us all we need: health and food, employment, love, and protection, the ground under our feet, the air in our lungs, and the clothes on our backs are all gifts from the same loving Father who forgives all our sins and preserves us in every time of testing. If devil or doubt, depravity or depravation attack you, this is your refuge, your Mighty Fortress.

Know God, rejoice in what He provides you, and depend on His grace. This is your prayer. This is your life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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