

Luke 11:1-13

Prayer is the theme before us today. We see Abraham pleading with the Lord. We see Jesus teaching His disciples about prayer. And we begin with the first words of our Introit from Psalm 50: “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble...*”

And who doesn't do this? Even soldiers in foxholes call upon God in prayer. The “foxhole prayer” is an actual term, prayed by any number of people in times of trouble. But “*how will they call upon Him in whom they have not believed?*” St. Paul asks this question in Romans 10.

There is a huge difference between the prayer of a Christian and the prayers of the people in the world. Those in the world see prayer as a negotiation process with a superpower. And when you negotiate, you strike a deal. To get what you want, you have to give something in return. And thus the prayers of the world are filled with pledges and promises. “If you get me out of this mess, God, I promise to become a better person.” “God, I will give up cursing, and drinking, and chasing after women, if You only help me out of my trouble.”

This is not prayer. It's bargaining. And it's all that the world knows how to do. But you're different. You're a Christian, baptized into Christ. And the model of your prayer life is the prayer Jesus gives to you. The first two words show us what is at the very heart of prayer: “*Our Father.*”

Prayer is not negotiating with God. It's not trying to butter Him up with our praises and thanksgivings so He'll give us what we want. Prayer, at its heart, is not even something that springs from our need. Instead prayer springs from our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Jesus would not teach you to pray, “*Our Father...*” if you were not His dear child. And so when you pray, you are a son or a daughter speaking to your Father who loves you.

Jesus gives us a rather absurd story to teach us about prayer. A friend knocks on the door of a friend in the dead of night asking for three loaves of bread, because a friend of his has arrived on a journey, and he has nothing to set before him. But the man inside refuses to open the door. Yet because of the friend's persistence in knocking, he opens the door and gives him what he needs.

Now this story teaches us to persist in prayer and not give up. But it also teaches us of our relationship with our Father in heaven. Think about this... What if that man were to knock on the door, not of a friend, but of a complete stranger, asking him for bread in the dead of night? The stranger inside might open the door, yet not to give him three loaves, but a punch in the mouth. The friend, therefore, persists in his knocking because he is confident in the relationship that he has with the man sleeping inside. The man is no stranger, but is his friend.

And how much more is God to you! He is your dear Father. His door is never locked to you. He never sleeps. He is never reluctant to give even more than what you need. And He tenderly invites you to call upon Him at all times.

So do we? Well, we do call upon Him in the day of trouble. But even those in the world do that. If our prayer life is dictated by the amount of trouble we have, or don't have, on a day-to-day basis, then we have much to learn about prayer and about the One to whom we pray.

The truth is that all of us have a problem with prayer. This comes naturally. For as the Scriptures declare, we are all born without trust in God. If we don't trust God, we are not going to pray to Him.

But you are baptized into Christ. You are God's children. You call Him *Our Father*. And so you do pray with trust. Yet even as we pray, sin is right there in the heart along with faith. And so we find it hard to pray, especially when sin gains the upper hand.

And this causes us to have guilt. We know we should pray more, and persist in prayer. Yet the harder we try, the more we fail. And we even have doubts if we are Christians, because we're taught that Christians pray...a lot. What else can it mean except that my relationship with my Heavenly Father is suffering, when my prayers become less and less frequent?

Do not have doubts. Do not despair. You are, and remain a son or daughter of your Father in heaven because you are, and remain His baptized child in Christ Jesus. Your prayer life, or lack of it, does not make you more or less God's child. Your relationship may be suffering, but only on your end. Your Heavenly Father loves you no less the less you pray, and no more the more you pray. In fact it is true that we are supposed to fail with our prayers. Only when we fail do we let God take over.

Prayer is spiritual warfare. And our enemies are stronger than us. And so we fail. "*Could you not keep watch one hour?*" asks Jesus. No, we cannot! And if somehow we become successful in prayer, we attribute this to ourself and think we are progressing spiritually. This makes us overconfident; confident in ourself, in our strength.

But we have none. Jesus is your strength. Jesus battles your enemies for you. And the more you fail in prayer, the more He prays for you. He never gives up. He always persists. And He promises you the Holy Spirit. He will help you to pray. He groans from within you to your Father in heaven. You never pray alone. The Holy Spirit is always praying with you.

And about your relationship with your Father in heaven... It's through Jesus. And He died and rose again for you. This is why He teaches you to pray, "*Father...forgive us our trespasses...*" Jesus would not teach these words to you if your Heavenly Father was unwilling to forgive you. He does forgive you. Jesus' cross made this a sure and lasting truth.

And so we pray. We pray for forgiveness, believing that God forgives. We pray because we have needs. We pray because we are weak. And we pray because we have a Father in heaven who loves us. Amen.