



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-July 24th 2022

Readings: Genesis 18: 20-32, Psalm 137, Colossians 2: 12-14,

Luke 11: 1-13

It is scarcely more than four dozen words but it changed the course of history, redefined the destiny of Man and illuminated the relationship between us frail mortals and the One, True, Living and Almighty God. I refer, of course, to the Paternoster, the 'Our Father', the supreme model of prayer which Jesus gives to His disciples down all the ages and the prayer which binds the Church together.

Many years ago I recall a regular and devout parishioner querying why the Liturgical invitation to pray it in the Mass was phrased thus, 'Formed by divine teachingwe DARE to say'.

The answer is simple and overwhelming. The God to whom we pray is ONE,HOLY,ETERNAL, OMNISCIENT, OMNIPOTENT,CREATOR OF ALL etc. etc. That we, mere creatures of blood and dust, call Him 'Father' is an act of daring only possible if we are 'in Christ' - in His only begotten Son. Standing before the One who is the Great I AM of existence, Lord of time and eternity, creator of the furthest reaches of cosmos and galaxies, we might do well to consider our position otherwise. So, 'IN CHRIST', we DARE because, in our baptism we are immersed in His divine life and

adopted as children of God – little brothers and sisters of Jesus – Mary of the Church Our Mother, FAMILY.

This is a spectacular claim but at the very heart of our Faith.

When Jesus gives His disciples this precious prayer, He gives the key to our self- understanding before God and the spiritual portal to God's relationship with Man – with us. Today's lection gives us a rare moment to reflect on this great foundational prayer which, too often, trips lightly off our tongue as a kind of round up and rubber stamp of all our petitions.

Let's pause to look and listen again- as if it was new and we were the first disciples to hear it.

'Our' – the prayer begins with an acknowledgement of the nature of our family life. We are not disconnected individuals. We do not pray, 'MY Father'. We are together on the way, brothers and sisters, not solo artists trying to get to Heaven under our own steam. Our relationship with one another depends on this first key word.

'Father' – the relationship is initially between Creator and Creature. In Christ this impersonal relationship of our Fallen-ness is transformed into the relationship of father and child. The apparent indifference of a hostile universe, Man clinging to existence, is transformed by this revelation of intimate relationship and love flowing from the One who is our origin and our end. Even more than that, the word for Father employed by Jesus is intensely familiar. It is the equivalent of 'Papa' .

'Hallowed be thy Name' – We encounter a vital principle here – the power of the Name. In an age when God's name is taken 'in vain' regularly and unthinkingly – OMG permeates the TV shows – we are reminded of the awesome privilege of knowing the name of God and being able to address Him thus. To know someone's name in the ancient world, was to be on intimate terms with them and know truly who they

were. To invoke the divine name as a swear word or form of moronic punctuation is to disobey the Commandments and downgrade God to an expletive. The Divine Name is Holy and to be held in reverence. Casual blasphemy is the product of a society at odds with its Creator, contemptuous of His power and existence.

‘Thy Kingdom come’ - This is a primary prayer of the Faith. Our hope is that, by evangelisation and the call to repentance (beginning with ourselves), all the world may see and embrace the salvation of God in His Son Jesus Christ. We are, as St Paul reminds us, Ambassadors of that eternal kingdom. We seek its just and gentle rule for the whole world. We are agents of its mercy and its frontline warriors of its Salvation.

‘Thy Will be Done’

Here we echo the response of Our Lady to the Archangel and pre-echo the response of Jesus in Gethsemane. ‘Be it unto me according to thy Word’ and ‘Not my will but thy will be done’. We are servants of the Master (unpopular language these days) seeking only His will which is the very best for those whom He has created and loves as a Father. We are ‘always and everywhere’ to be seeking to do His will. The collision of wills is our sin. The collaboration of our will with His is redemption in Christ.

‘On Earth as it is in Heaven’ – the world of time should mirror the world of eternity. The terrestrial should mirror the celestial. We seek the justice of the judge of all and rejoice in the foretaste of our destiny in the Sacraments. The thin veil that separates us from Heavenly things is pierced by this prayer for the words are Christ’s.

‘Give us this day our daily Bread’ is both a cry for physical sustenance on the journey and spiritual food of the altar – the sacrifice transforming the gifts of bread and wine and our very selves into the Body and Blood of Christ – the Viaticum of our pilgrimage.

‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive....’

The prayer teaches us the great spiritual truth that the unforgiving cannot receive forgiveness. Holding on to bitterness, resentment etc does not harm the object of our spleen but rather corrodes us and blocks the channels of God’s grace. Christ’s words of absolution from the Cross we needs must make our own. Unforgivingness, as Jesus makes clear in terrifying parables, is a self-inflicted imprisonment and the short road to Hell. It is no accident that, historically, the Sacrament of Confession and Reconciliation is the gateway to the altar and the reception of the summit and source – the Blessed Sacrament of Our Lord’s Body and Blood- our incorporation into Christ.

There is more, much more. These are mere headlines, aides memoire. As a simple spiritual exercise this week, take one phrase of this prayer gift of Jesus each day and live with it, mull it over, savour it, pray it slowly and with renewed understanding. Make it your own. See how it impacts your life and deepens your relationship with God the Father. Ask the Holy Spirit to breathe through your praying of the Paternoster. Reclaim it from a repetition to a response to the love of Christ Jesus Our Lord. Let Him bring it alive again in the depths of our being, little brothers and sisters of Jesus, faithful and grateful children of the Father.