

## SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME CYCLE C

---

FIRST READING: Genesis 18:20-32

A reading from the Book of Genesis:

In those days, the LORD said: "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out." While Abraham's visitors walked on farther toward Sodom, the LORD remained standing before Abraham. Then Abraham drew nearer and said: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?" The LORD replied, "If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." Abraham spoke up again: "See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes! What if there are five less than fifty innocent people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?" He answered, "I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there." But Abraham persisted, saying "What if only forty are found there?" He replied, "I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty." Then Abraham said, "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?" He replied, "I will forbear doing it if I can find but thirty there." Still Abraham went on, "Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?" The LORD answered, "I will not destroy it, for the sake of the twenty." But he still persisted: "Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time. What if there are at least ten there?" He replied, "For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8

**Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.**

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth; in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise; I will worship at your holy temple and give thanks to your name.

**Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.**

Because of your kindness and your truth; for you have made great above all things your name and your promise. When I called you answered me; you built up strength within me.

**Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.**

The Lord is exalted, yet the lowly he sees, and the proud he knows from afar. Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me; against the anger of my enemies you raise your hand.

**Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.**

Your right hand saves me. The Lord will complete what he has done for me; your kindness, O Lord, endures forever; forsake not the work of your hands.

**Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.**

SECOND READING: Colossians 2:12-14

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Brothers and sisters: You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And even when you were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 11:1-13

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. "And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

The Gospel of the Lord

## **Reflection for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year**

Once in a while, I remember what one of my old scripture professors taught me while still in the seminary about how the editors of our lectionary built it. On Sundays we have four passages that make up the lesson for the day. Most of the time there is a first reading from the Jewish Scriptures that we call the Old Testament. During the Easter season, the first reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Following the first reading is a Psalm or Canticle. We are all familiar with the Book of Psalms; there are one hundred fifty of them. They were songs and hymns that were sung during Jewish worship. The Psalm is often chanted or sung on Sunday by a cantor. This links us, as Christians, with our deep Jewish roots. We participate in the hymn-prayer by chanting or singing the Psalm's Response.

Then there is the second reading which is always read from the Christian Scriptures that we call the New Testament. These readings are from the writings that are not the gospels; the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation. The final reading is from one of the Four Gospels. Much of the time there is a clear thematic connection between the first reading and the gospel. The second reading seems out of place most of the time. We are reading passages from the Letter to the Colossians attributed to the apostle Paul. We read these passages in order. Herein is what my old professor taught me.

When approaching the Sunday's lesson, start with the thematic content of the second reading; for it is the key-pin around which the editors picked the other three readings. Usually I can make it work. It takes more work, sometimes. Today's lesson is an example of the editors' plan. On first glance, what does the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah have to do with the prayer of Jesus? Let me lay it out and set the ground work.

Paul wrote of the mission of Jesus. His mission was to preach the Word of God; the Good News of Salvation. Jesus saved us with his dying on the cross. His rising is the sign of our promised New Life. God has saved us out of God's nature. God is love; infinite, eternal and unconditional. In the cross, Jesus forgave our sins and broke the bonds of death. The sign of this, for us, is our having faith and having been baptized. Because of Jesus' resurrection we are now bound for eternal life. God's indwelling life binds us irrevocably to God through faith. In Jesus, who is like us in all things but sin, intimacy with God is possible. God wants to be as close to us as God can.

This is the basis to discern the significance of the other three readings. Today's lesson is about the means we have to maintain intimacy with God; prayer. Abraham was intimately connected to God. God was his God and Abraham was God's beloved. God had entered a covenant with Abraham. It was sealed with a promise to Abraham that he would father many children. Abraham is the source of three world religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We Catholics are part of the fruits of the covenant.

In today's reading, Abraham seems to haggle with God and, at first, seems to have more mercy than God has. We know differently. God's mercy knows no boundary. Abraham, like all of us, is finite and flawed. Abraham is actually praying. In doing so, he is actually strengthening the intimacy he shares with God. How do we know this? Each time Abraham shows mercy, God grants it. Fortunately, we don't hear of the twin cities' final fate and of the fate of the only godly

people living there. It was Abraham's kinsman Lot and his family. God got them out before the destruction began. The only godly people were Lot and his family, not quite ten. However, each time Abraham prayed with God, God responded with compassion.

In the gospel, the disciples want to learn to pray. Jesus taught them a prayer, what we call the Our Father. Most people are surprised to hear that there are two different versions. The more familiar to us is Matthew's version. There are only five petitions in Luke and seven in Matthew. The word for daily bread is actually tomorrow's bread. In praying for the Kingdom to come, this is the food to get us there. Being linked to Jesus' second coming, this bread can be eternal life with Jesus. God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others are also linked together. God forgives us so we can forgive each other.

In forgiving others we show that God forgives us. God frees us from sin. Forgiveness is letting go of the anger, outrage and grudges we all can bear. To forgive, we never condone the hurtful deeds of others. We let go of the hurt. Only God can forgive and forget. For us it's different. To quote the historian George Santayana, "Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." When we forgive hurtful people, the most loving thing we can offer them may be to avoid contact with them in the future.

What's the "final test?" Is it some kind of final exam? Is it the Final Judgment when at last Jesus returns? In this context no. The final test is linked to the cross of Jesus. He died, willingly, on it. Luke wrote his gospel and Acts in about the years 80-90 CE. This was after persecution had begun of Christians. The final test was to give one's life for Jesus and the faith. The actual test was to choose death over giving up faith in Jesus. It wasn't death itself for all people eventually die. One is faithful to Jesus like Jesus is faithful to us; choosing the cross or a martyr's death. Jesus prayed that we, his followers and disciples, would not face that final choice.

Jesus parable about the neighbor with late night guests has a context. Jesus and his audience were First Century Palestinian Jews. Hospitality was a critical component of Jewish life, especially to travelers. An entire village made up of kinsmen had a collective reputation to maintain. The village folk were proud of their hospitality. For someone to refuse a neighbor in need was an affront to the whole village. The Greek word used to describe the neighbor's final disposition for generosity is *anaideia*. The word the New American Bible uses for it is persistence. *Aideia* means shame. *An* means the negative of it. *Anaideia* means avoidance of shame. For the sleeping neighbor to refuse to offer hospitality was unthinkable in Jesus' society.

The lesson of offering God our petitions is not to storm the gates of heaven with our prayers. God wants us to pray as often as we can; to pray to God always. Sometimes we read this and think that God is an all powerful Santa Claus. For what do we ask, seek and knock? Do we ask to win the lottery? Do we seek our heart's desire? To what will door number three open? We pray for a lot of things, world peace, health, wellbeing, and an end to all our problems. Our prayers can be profound or trivial. But the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, what does God give? Good things. God gave us life and keeps us alive. We believe; God gave us faith. We have other people in our lives; God has given us family and community. We are unique, intelligent and talented people. At the end of the gospel Jesus told us God gives us the Holy Spirit when we pray. As Mick Jagger sang, "You can't always get what you want – sometimes you get what you need."

Jesus has taught us to pray often. Each time a thought of God enters our minds, it's prayer. Whether intense or casual and passing, prayer brings us closer to God. All of us can pray like Abraham, intimately with God. God is never far; God is near as thought.

May our prayers always reveal our desire and need for God.

James D. Beath  
July 23-24, 2022

*PS: I will be away for a few days and will not write reflections for next Tuesday & Thursday, July 26 & 28. I will write one for Saturday – Sunday, July 30-31. I have mass at 9 & 11, on July 31, at Our Lady Mother of the Church.*