

Meaning and Beauty: The Lord's Prayer

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Submitted by Dr. Rosemary Murphy

One aspect of our Catholic liturgy is the richness of its prayers and scriptures. In every Sunday Mass there are multiple “take-aways” for our reflection and inspiration. This particular Sunday, there may be many fine homilies that focus on Jesus’ teaching about prayer and the importance of persistence – we need to hear those messages. However, what would happen in our communal and personal prayer life if we were to really pause and appreciate the beauty and meaning of the Lord’s Prayer? When we say or sing the Our Father, do we *feel* its beauty? Do we *experience the awe* of its power?

In today’s Gospel from Luke, we meet Jesus in prayer just as he is interrupted with a request. The disciple asks Jesus to, “teach us to pray.” The request provides Jesus the opportunity to connect his followers, not only to *his* Father, but to *our* Father as well. Ancient people and early liturgists addressed the Divine as God or Lord – very rarely as Father!

How awesome that the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’ own words, connect us to the deepest reality of his relationship to God as Son and connect us to one another as brothers and sisters. Do we sense the beauty of this intimacy? What does it mean for our unity, our communion with, our treatment of and our service to others who are also sons and daughters of our Father, Jesus’ Father?

The Lord’s Prayer as found in the gospels of Luke and Matthew (6:9-13) and in the earliest Christian handbook, the *Didache*, is the foundational prayer of the Christian faith. It has a treasured ecumenical significance for us. When we Catholics repeat the words at Mass or in personal prayer, we connect to our brothers and sisters of other Christian faith traditions. Jesus invites disciples of all faiths to share his mission and ministry: to bring about the kingdom of God by doing the will of our Father.

As member of the human species, we have the capacity to create meaning and beauty and witness to it in Jesus’ prayer. We also experience the human desire to communicate with God and with one another. It is so important, therefore, that when confronted with the challenges and threats in our world today, we understand who we are in relationship to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we understand that beauty and meaning are attributes of the Divine; and that in carrying out the work of Jesus, part of our service is to discover and express the beauty and meaning of every day. It is our pathway to an eternal beatific union with the personal God who loves us as kin.