

Sunday Homily

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

24 JULY 2022

YEAR C

“How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Luke 11:13

Illustration

Each one of us is a unique child of God. So each of us prays in our own way – expressing our relationship to God in the way that comes most easily to us. But sometimes we are lost for words. Sometimes we are depressed, not sure of ourselves, anxious, fearful and we know we need to pray but find we can't. It is then that the promise mentioned in the letter to the Romans comes to our rescue (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit of God dwells in us, so we can let the Holy Spirit pray in us. Jesus himself shows us the way. And when the disciples need to know more, he teaches them how to pray.

Gospel Teaching

Today we hear Jesus leading his disciples into greater awareness of discipleship. They were with him, talking, listening, eating, sleeping in his company, but they understood prayer to be something different from their direct interaction with him. They had a model of prayer which fitted their Jewish culture and time: formal, precise and fitting a required format. They were familiar, as Jesus was, with the prayers of the Psalms.

But they were to understand that God is flexible in his listening and that presence is as important as words. They were in Jesus' company and yet did not recognise this as prayer. They were preaching the good news and healing but still they wanted what John's followers had: a formula, a set of words which said what they thought was missing from their lives. They were searching for something lost, or not yet discovered.

As usual, Jesus offered them much more than they expected. He did not give them a theory about how to pray, or a lecture on the nature and purpose of prayer. He didn't rebuke them for their lack of insight into the nature of their fellowship with him. He didn't give them techniques for breathing and for concentration, or ways of avoiding distraction, so that they could become "professional" in their prayers. Instead, he inducted them into his own relationship with God.

He gave them a new insight into the nature of our God, "Abba", (Daddy) in place of the formal term for a mighty and distant God. He showed them a side to

the Almighty, to his relationship with God and their own, which they had never before experienced, one of intimacy and intensity and all-embracing love, the kind of love and sacrifice which offered them all that a loving parent gives to a beloved child and much greater than that which friends share. The prayer he gave them contains everything which human beings need for their well-being, but which God knows even before we utter it. In their search for God, Jesus gave the disciples the perfect formula until they fully recognised the full reality of who it was that gave it to them.

Application

To want to search for God is, in itself, a gift of God. To search is to find because Jesus, who is the bridge between heaven and earth, and the Holy Spirit, at the heart of all prayer, provide the practical teaching and the spiritual inspiration which draw us towards the truth. We often search in the vain hope of finding our lost something when the uncertain world cannot provide the security we need. Frequently it is in this state of vulnerability that we find God, because our reaching out is sincere and usually in the complete faith which can risk everything, because there is nothing to lose.

It is for times like these that we were given what we know as the Lord's Prayer. It is all we need, if needing words at all. For it has been said that one minute with our full attention given to God with our whole presence is enough; God is not limited by our notions of time. Jesus understood our reliance on concrete terms, the recognisable formula and our need to express our yearnings in ways which convince us – and it is our needs that we are thinking of.

The Lord's Prayer says everything we need to say in words and brings us into God's presence as surely as the disciples were present to the person of Jesus. We can pray with confidence, certain that our prayer is heard.