Thursday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 6:7-15): Jesus said to his disciples: “In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“This is how you are to pray: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’

“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.”

“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him”

Fr. Emili MARLÉS i Romeu
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the Lord wants to help us grow in a central theme of our Christian life: prayer. He warns us not to pray like pagans who try to convince God of what they want. Many times, we try to get what we want through insistence, making ourselves "a pain" to God, believing that we will be able to make ourselves heard with our verbiage. The Lord reminds us that the Father is constantly attentive to our life and that, at all times; He knows what we need before we ask Him (cf. Mt 6:8). Do we live with this trust? Am I aware that the Father washes my feet continually and that He knows better than anyone what I need at all times (in big and small things)?

Jesus opens for us a new horizon of prayer: the prayer of those who turn to God with the awareness of children. The type of relationship I have with a person determines the way in which I ask for things, and also what I can expect from him. From a father, and especially from the heavenly Father, I can expect everything and I know that He takes care of my life. That is why Jesus, who always lives as an authentic son, tells us "do not worry about your life: what you will eat" (Mt 6:25). Do I really have this awareness as a son? Do I address God with the same familiarity that I address my father or mother?

Later, Jesus opens His heart to us, and shows us what His relationship/prayer with the Father is like, so that we can also make it ours. With the prayer of the "Our Father," Jesus teaches us to live as children.

Saint Cyprian has a well-known comment about the “Our Father”, in which he tells us: “We ought then, beloved brethren, to remember and to know, that when we call God Father, we ought to act as God's children; so that in the measure in which we find pleasure in considering God as a Father, He might also be able to find pleasure in us.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “For since He says, that whatsoever we shall ask of the Father in His name, He will give us, how much more effectually do we obtain what we ask in Christ's name, if we ask for it in His own prayer!” (Saint Cyprian)

- “The disciples, seduced by the person of Jesus while he was praying, ask him how to pray. The “Our Father” is the answer. It is a prayer concentrated in seven petitions, full of theological meaning, in contrast to the chatter and verbiage.” (Benedict XVI)

- “‘The Lord's Prayer is truly the summary of the whole gospel’ (Tertullian). Since the Lord after handing over the practice of prayer, said elsewhere, 'Ask and you will receive,' and since everyone has petitions which are peculiar to his circumstances, the regular and appropriate prayer [the Lord's Prayer] is said first, as the foundation of further desires." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 2761)

Other comments

“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you”

Fr. Joan MARQUÉS i Suriñach
(Vilamarí, Girona, Spain)

Today, Jesus proposes a great and difficult target: to forgive those who offend us. And He establishes a very reasonable measure, our measure: “If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Mt 6:14-15). In another place, He had already given us the Golden Rule of human coexistence: “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets” (Mt 7:12).

We want God to forgive us and would like others to forgive us too; but, on the other hand, we seem quite reluctant to do it ourselves. To apologize is kind of difficult; but to forgive is even more so. Should we be humbler, it should not be so difficult; but our pride makes it much harder. This is why we could establish the following equation: the humbler, the easier; the prouder, the more difficult. This will give us a clue to find out our degree of humility.

When the Spanish Civil War was over (1939), some ex-captive priests were celebrating a thanksgiving mass

in a small town, somewhere in Spain. The officiating priest, after saying the words of the Lord's Prayer “and forgive us our trespasses”, he remained speechless and was unable to go on. He could not drive himself to forgive those who had made them suffer so much in a hard labor camp, in that very same town. After a few moments of a most impressive silence, he went on with the prayer: “as we forgive those who trespass against us”. Afterwards, they asked themselves which homily had been the best one. And they all agreed: the silence of the officiating priest when he was saying the Lord’s Prayer. It is difficult, but with the Lord’s help it is possible.

Furthermore, God's forgiveness is total; it gets as far as oblivion. We tend to forget quickly the favors we receive, but not so much so with offenses... If married couples knew how to forget them, they would avoid, and probably overcome, many family dramas.

Let us hope the Mother of mercy helps us in understanding our fellow men and forgiving them totally.