

**Mass Readings: July 30, 2028**  
**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.**

**Genesis 18:20-18:32**

18:20. Then the Lord said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! 18:21. I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know." 18:22. So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord 18:23. Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 18:24. Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 18:25. Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" 18:26. And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." 18:27. Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. 18:28. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 18:29. Again he spoke to him, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." 18:30. Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." 18:31. He said, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." 18:32. Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

**Psalms 138:1-138:2a, 138:2b-138:3, 138:6-138:7a, 138:7b-138:8**

**Colossians 2:12-2:14**

2:12. when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 2:13. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 2:14. erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.

**Luke 11:1-11:13**

11:1. He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." 11:2. He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 11:3. Give us each day our daily bread. 11:4. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." 11:5. And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 11:6. for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 11:7. And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 11:8. I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. 11:9. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 11:10. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11:11. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 11:12. Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 11:13. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

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## Merciful Missionaries living in the freedom of God's love

On this Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, opening our hearts and minds to the sacred Scriptures, we listen to understand. The readings speak powerfully about the importance and nature of personal relationship with God, persistent and intercessory prayer, as well as trusting that God is boundless in mercy and generosity. After Adam and Eve fell into original sin, forever changing their relationship with God, God's first approach to his fallen creation, was mercy. Not mercy without consequence, but mercy informed by hope. We recall this truth in Eucharistic Prayer IV when the Priest prays, "*And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you.*"<sup>1</sup>

As we reflect on these readings, there are three general take aways that each of us can consider today and throughout the week: Divine intimacy, Persistent Prayer, and Trust. The extraordinary Cathedrals of Europe as well as some beautiful Cathedrals in the US, with their vaulted ceilings, stunning paintings and mosaics, and prismatic stain glass windows embody these three characteristics of Christian prayer. The first characteristic of Christian prayer that they embody is intimacy. Jesus taught us to call God our Father, to pray with the intimacy of children. The very immensity of the medieval cathedrals reveals this intimacy. It elevates our heart and mind while drawing our spiritual gaze upward as though raptured to the heavens. God beckons to us through the breathtaking beauty of the sacred. This intimacy is also communicated by the simple fact that when we pray inside one of these cathedrals, there is no separation between us and the altar and tabernacle, the places of the sacrifice and of God's most intense presence. In Christ, God has become close enough to touch.

Secondly, the importance of persistence, that we do not grow weary in prayer. Some of Churches took a century or more to build. Generations in the same family would work on them for their entire. Without persistent prayer such works for God would not ever overcome the enormous challenges the people faced. Praying also as they would, for each other and for the souls of those who died laboring for the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Whether every laborer or benefactor had great, little, or no faith themselves – the result in the art of the windows, floors, and walls all cry out to us through the centuries of the people of God who since the beginning have persistently cried out to God in prayer.

Finally, these sacred spaces in which our merciful God hears and responds to our prayers, also symbolize the confidence that Christ asks us to have in our prayer. Each of these cathedrals surrounds us with countless images of saints, with scenes from scripture depicted in stained glass and relief sculpture, with relics preserved on side altars and in elaborate reliquaries, with hundreds of candles silently flickering in the filtered light, with a visual symphony of evidence that prayer is fruitful, that God has always been and will always be interested and involved in our lives. Trust in God's Generosity. Our Heavenly Father is infinitely good and desires to give us what is truly good, especially the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Let us ask for the Holy Spirit to guide us, strengthen us, and fill us with His gifts. Live in the Freedom of Forgiveness: Remember the new life and complete forgiveness we have received in Christ through baptism.<sup>4</sup> This freedom allows us to approach God without fear, confident in His merciful love. This is what we see in demonstrated and encouraged in the readings today.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II](#), Third Typical Edition (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 657.

<sup>2</sup> [Gen 18:20-32; Ps 138:1-2a, 2b-3, 6-7a, 7b-8; Luke 11:1-13](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Ps 138:1-2a, 2b-3, 6-7a, 7b-8; Luke 11:1-13;](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Luke 11:1-13; General Audience of 18 May 2011: Man in Prayer](#)

In the Old Testament reading, Abraham boldly and persistently intercedes to God asking for the mercy of God for others. In this intimate conversation made possible by their covenantal relationship, Abraham engages God with fear and trembling, with humility, because he knows that God is a just God, and is aware that Sodom and Gomorrah's sin is great. He daringly asked for leniency for the innocent, but more than that, for the sake of the righteous he asked that the sinners be spared as well. He discovers that God is indeed willing to be merciful to the inhabitants of the whole city: *"I will spare the whole place for their sake."* <sup>Gen 18:26</sup> Abraham's prayer gives voice to God's own desire for mercy and demonstrates the power of intercession for the salvation of others.<sup>5</sup> Sadly for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, only Lot's family is saved, since during the visitation of the Angels of the Lord no one in the town was found to be with God, *"Before they went to bed, the townsmen of Sodom, both young and old—all the people to the last man—surrounded the house."* <sup>6</sup> Thus, the Angels asked Lot to gather his family and leave, *"We are about to destroy this place, for the outcry reaching the LORD against those here is so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it."* <sup>7</sup>

Abraham was not successful at saving Sodom and Gomorrah, but he was successful at modeling for us what a Christian should be in the world: a merciful missionary. Abraham is also foreshadowing the work of Christ to intercede for us to the Father. Jesus himself, in his person, is the Father's Gift of Mercy. We are again, reminded of this truth as the Priest prays Eucharistic Prayer IV, *"you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you. Time and again you offered them covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation. And you so loved the world, Father most holy, that in the fullness of time you sent your Only Begotten Son to be our Savior."* <sup>8</sup>

The Responsorial Psalm gathers together the themes of Divine intimacy, persistent prayer, and trust. It is a song of born of intimate relationship with God; it is one moment in the spiritual life of David expressing alongside all his songs his persistence in prayer; it is thanksgiving and trust in God's steadfast love and faithfulness. It speaks of God answering when called upon, increasing strength of soul, and fulfilling their purpose for those who trust in God. Even when walking in trouble, the Lord preserves and delivers.

The second reading from the Letter to the Colossians by St. Paul, reminds us of the transformative power of our baptism in Christ. He emphasizes that when we *"were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross."* This passage highlights the complete forgiveness and new life we receive through Christ's sacrifice, freeing us from the burden of sin and the demands of the law. Freeing us to choose life, choose the good, the true, and the beautiful – to choose God.

This is the theological foundation for our ability to approach God with confidence in prayer. Through baptism, we have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, and our sins have been completely forgiven. We, who repent and believe are no longer alienated from God by our trespasses but have been made alive with Christ. This new life in Christ, marked by forgiveness and reconciliation, empowers us to approach God as beloved children, just as Jesus taught us to pray, "Father".

Finally, in the Gospel reading we hear that Jesus, in response to the disciple's petition, teaches them what to pray for, how to pray and what results they can expect from their prayer. He gives them the prayer that

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<sup>5</sup> [Col 2:12-14](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Gen 19:4](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Gen 19:13](#)

<sup>8</sup> [The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II](#), Third Typical Edition (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 657.

has come to be universally known as the Our Father. Each phrase is a font of wisdom. They are worth studying and thinking about deeply, because they show us how God wants us to approach and to be with them. In fact, as is usually the way of God, Jesus does more than they ask. He assures us that if even earthly parents, who are imperfect, know how to give good gifts to their children, *"how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*.

The instruction on Christian prayer that Jesus gives, is of course solid practical advice, but it is also something else. It is a glimpse into the heart of the Lord, showing us, that God is a God who desires a familial, that is, covenantal relationship with us. However, as much as God wants to regain and deepen our relationship, we must possess the same desire. Jesus says: *"Seek and you will find, ask and you will receive."* But seeking and asking are choices we make in freedom, they are up to us, Jesus won't force us to do either one of them. God longs for us to do so. The Holy Spirit does everything possible to stir up that desire within us.

But Jesus knows that because we are human beings - we tend to fall into routine. So even though he gives us the perfect words to use in prayer, he knows we will tend to just learn them by heart and then mindlessly rattle them off. And so, he also teaches us that having and growing in relationship with God is greatly dependent upon the dispositions of persistence and trust. In fact, these dispositions ought to form the spiritual foundations of every Christian's relationship with God, as they were for Abraham, David, and St. Paul. If we are persistent in prayer, as the friend was persistent in the parable, we give God more freedom to act in our lives, because our desires increasingly align with God's.

God, a loving and merciful Father doesn't need to be persuaded or to have his arm twisted to give us what we need. Neither will God give us what we want, for our wants are often short-sighted and self-centered. The way we pray and what we ask for can be extremely revealing of where we are in our relationship with God, with people and with the world around us. Persevering prayer can help us become more aware of what we should really be asking for. It helps to purify our prayer, make clear our values and hopes, and lead us to ask for what is really in our very best interests.

Jesus tells them that to pray, we must begin by speaking to God as a Father. But, since we live in a fallen world, we sometimes project our own imperfections onto God and make it difficult for ourselves to trust God as a good father. We think that, like us, God is selfish, easily angered, and resentful. As a result, sometimes we hesitate to open our hearts in prayer. But, in union with the Holy Spirit, Jesus desires to heal us of these wounds and free us of these misconceptions. God is our Father, a better father than any natural father. So, if our natural fathers know how to be generous and wise with their children, we can rest assured that God is much more like that with us. God won't give us stones when we ask for bread.

In the gospel reading the instruction that Jesus gives us about Christian prayer, we should find relief for the pressure that many disciples of Christ experience. Sometimes we feel that praying is like interviewing for a job or we feel as if we only have one chance to get it right, and if we say the wrong thing or pray in the wrong way, we will be rejected. Truth be told, God will never reject any sincere prayer of the heart. All God asks is that we try to be humble, persistent, and trusting / confident in our prayer. For those who would like to explore the Lords' Prayer in more depth, I recommend Pope Benedict XVI's book "Jesus of Nazareth", in which he delves into the prayer line by line. He emphasizes that the Our Father prayer encompasses both our earthly needs and our spiritual nourishment. Meaning, the bread that is *"is necessary for existence"* and *"Bread for the future"*. The prayer asks for "tomorrow's bread" for today. Thus, the prayer is also understood to be asking for the Eucharist.

The climax of Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Gospel is His assurance of the Father's generosity. This is a crucial point: the ultimate gift God desires to give us is not merely material blessings, but the very Spirit of God Himself. The Holy Spirit is the source of all good gifts, enabling us to listen, understand, and act.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Divine Intimacy:** A close, personal, and familial relationship with God, characterized by trust and open communication, as of a child with their parent.
- **Persistent Prayer:** Continuous, unwavering prayer; not giving up on prayer despite challenges, delays, or perceived lack of immediate response.
- **Trust (in God's Generosity):** The confident belief that God is infinitely good, merciful, and desires to provide what is truly beneficial, especially spiritual gifts like the Holy Spirit.
- **Original Sin:** The first sin committed by Adam and Eve, which resulted in the loss of their friendship with God and introduced consequences for humanity, yet was met by God's mercy.
- **Eucharistic Prayer IV:** A specific prayer within the Roman Missal that recounts salvation history, emphasizing God's continuous mercy and sending of Christ as Savior.
- **Intercessory Prayer:** Prayer offered on behalf of others, as modeled by Abraham in the Old Testament reading.
- **Covenantal Relationship:** A solemn agreement or bond between God and humanity, based on mutual promises and commitment, signifying a deep and personal connection.
- **Merciful Missionary:** One who embodies and extends God's mercy to the world, often through prayer and intercession, serving as a model for Christian action. Abraham is presented as an example.
- **The Lord's Prayer (Our Father):** The prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples, serving as a model for Christian prayer, encompassing both earthly and spiritual needs.
- **Holy Spirit:** The third person of the Trinity, desired by God to be given to those who ask; the source of all good gifts, enabling understanding, action, and guiding the believer.
- **Baptism:** A Christian sacrament symbolizing spiritual rebirth, forgiveness of sins, and union with Christ in His death and resurrection, leading to a new life in God.
- **Dispositions of Prayer:** The inner attitudes and qualities (such as humility, persistence, and trust) that are essential for meaningful and effective prayer.
- **Pope Benedict XVI's "Jesus of Nazareth":** A theological work by Pope Benedict XVI that delves into the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, emphasizing its dual request for "bread" (both physical and spiritual, including the Eucharist).

## Main Themes of "Merciful Missionaries"

Summary of the key themes and important ideas presented in the Homily "Merciful Missionaries", focusing on the nature of Christian prayer, humanity's relationship with God, and the concept of divine mercy.

### I. Overarching Themes

The document highlights three interconnected and foundational themes for Christian life and prayer: **Divine Intimacy, Persistent Prayer, and Trust in God's Generosity.** These themes are presented as central to understanding one's relationship with God and are exemplified through biblical narratives and the symbolism of grand cathedrals.

### II. Core Concepts and Supporting Details

#### A. Divine Intimacy

- **God's Initiative of Mercy:** After the Fall, God's "first approach to his fallen creation, was mercy." This is underscored by Eucharistic Prayer IV: "And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you."
- **Familial Relationship with God:** Jesus teaches believers to approach God as "Our Father," fostering "the intimacy of children." This signifies a covenantal relationship, not merely a transactional one.
- **Symbolism of Cathedrals:** The immense beauty of cathedrals—their "vaulted ceilings, stunning paintings and mosaics, and prismatic stain glass windows"—are described as embodying intimacy by "elevat[ing] our heart and mind while drawing our spiritual gaze upward as though raptured to the heavens." Furthermore, the absence of separation between the worshipper and the altar/tabernacle within these spaces signifies God becoming "close enough to touch" in Christ.
- **Freedom of Forgiveness:** Through baptism, believers receive "new life and complete forgiveness... freeing us from the burden of sin and the demands of the law," which allows for approaching God "without fear, confident in His merciful love."

## B. Persistent Prayer

- **Necessity for Overcoming Challenges:** Just as some European cathedrals took "a century or more to build," requiring "generations in the same family" to work on them, persistent prayer is essential to "overcome the enormous challenges the people faced."
- **Biblical Models of Persistence:**
  - **Abraham:** The Old Testament reading emphasizes Abraham's "boldly and persistently intercedes to God asking for the mercy of God for others." Despite Sodom and Gomorrah's ultimate destruction, Abraham's "intimate conversation made possible by their covenantal relationship" with God models the power of intercessory prayer.
  - **David:** The Responsorial Psalm is described as "a song of born of intimate relationship with God; it is one moment in the spiritual life of David expressing alongside all his songs his persistence in prayer."
- **Purification of Prayer:** Persevering prayer "helps to purify our prayer, make clear our values and hopes, and lead us to ask for what is really in our very best interests." It helps align human desires with God's.
- **God's Freedom to Act:** "If we are persistent in prayer... we give God more freedom to act in our lives, because our desires increasingly align with God's."
- **Humility, Persistence, and Trust:** God "will never reject any sincere prayer of the heart. All God asks is that we try to be humble, persistent, and trusting / confident in our prayer."

## C. Trust in God's Generosity

- **God as a Generous Father:** The document stresses that "Our Heavenly Father is infinitely good and desires to give us what is truly good, especially the Holy Spirit." Jesus reassures believers that if imperfect earthly parents know how to give good gifts, "how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"
- **Cathedrals as Evidence of Fruitful Prayer:** The "countless images of saints, with scenes from scripture depicted in stained glass and relief sculpture, with relics... with hundreds of candles silently flickering" within cathedrals serve as "a visual symphony of evidence that prayer is fruitful, that God has always been and will always be interested and involved in our lives."

- **The Holy Spirit as the Ultimate Gift:** The "climax of Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Gospel is His assurance of the Father's generosity. This is a crucial point: the ultimate gift God desires to give us is not merely material blessings, but the very Spirit of God Himself." The Holy Spirit empowers believers to "listen, understand, and act."
- **God's Desire to Give, Not to Be Persuaded:** "God, a loving and merciful Father doesn't need to be persuaded or to have his arm twisted to give us what we need." God knows what is truly good, and human "wants are often short-sighted and self-centered."
- **Healing Misconceptions of God:** The document acknowledges that a "fallen world" can lead to projecting human imperfections onto God (selfishness, anger, resentment), making trust difficult. However, "in union with the Holy Spirit, Jesus desires to heal us of these wounds and free us of these misconceptions."

### III. The Lord's Prayer and its Significance

- **A "Font of Wisdom":** Jesus' teaching of the "Our Father" is presented as a profound guide for prayer, showing "how God wants us to approach and to be with them."
- **Beyond Rote Memorization:** While providing "perfect words," Jesus recognizes the human tendency to "mindlessly rattle them off." Therefore, the dispositions of "persistence and trust" are crucial for growing in relationship with God.
- **Earthly and Spiritual Nourishment:** Referencing Pope Benedict XVI, the "Our Father" encompasses both "earthly needs and our spiritual nourishment," with the request for "bread" understood as both "necessary for existence" and "Bread for the future," including the Eucharist.

### IV. Christ as the Embodiment of Mercy and Intercession

- **Foreshadowed by Abraham:** Abraham's intercession is seen as "foreshadowing the work of Christ to intercede for us to the Father."
- **The Father's Gift of Mercy:** Jesus himself "is the Father's Gift of Mercy," as echoed in Eucharistic Prayer IV: "you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you... you sent your Only Begotten Son to be our Savior."
- **Transformative Power of Baptism:** St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians highlights that through baptism, believers are "made alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross." This complete forgiveness forms the "theological foundation for our ability to approach God with confidence in prayer."

### V. Call to Action/Reflection

The homily encourages individuals to consider these three themes—Divine Intimacy, Persistent Prayer, and Trust—"today and throughout the week," urging them to "seek and you will find, ask and you will receive," understanding these as "choices we make in freedom." The Holy Spirit actively "stirs up that desire within us" to engage in this deeper relationship.