

Homily **17th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C** (28.7.19)

I love those ancient tribal stories that were passed on by word of mouth initially, and gathered together by the author of the book of Genesis and stitched together from prehistory, and we have this lovely one with Abraham testing God, asking him about a city that wasn't much to do with him. Well, will you do this if there's only so many and so on? And he gets right down to 10 and he's bartering with God about the future. And it reminds me that actually we do that sometimes in prayer, don't we? We barter with God, you know, if I do this, will you do that sort of thing? We try to trade with God. But Abraham was doing it for somebody else, for people he thought were innocent.

And Jesus seems to imply in the Gospel that that sort of style persistence will get you what you want. But notice when He says,

"Ask, search and knock."

The thing He says that you'll get is the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't say a wand will be waved and all your problems disappear. It's something like the consolation of the Spirit to deal with the problems of life.

And that asking, searching and knocking reminds me of **Saint Thomas More** who said

"Lord help me to labour for the things I pray for."

In other words, we have to work on what we pray for. But the thing that really hits me, is when His disciples ask Him to teach us how to pray. And I don't know whether you noticed in Luke's version, it's a very different Our Father to what the other Gospels give us. It's shorter, but it's got a little twist

"and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us."

It's a different translation than trespass. And it opens up a new venue for those who struggle. I know some people struggle with Jesus's understanding of forgiveness. You know Peter said,

"Lord how many times should I forgive my neighbor, seven times?"

Not seven times I tell you, but 77 times seven times, an impossible figure almost, of mercy, and forgiveness.

And He says pray for your enemies. Now, if you've been deeply hurt in life by someone or someone is dangerous to you and it could be a close relative, somebody who maybe has a compulsive disorder like drug addiction or alcohol abuse. Then this forgiveness can be a problem, especially because we're often associated with it. How can you pray for it, when it seems to imply reconciliation with someone who can't be reconciled and opening oneself up, maybe to being hurt again and again, and again.

And so the Our Father can be problematic, but this translation

'for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us',

opens up a new avenue. Because some people are bankrupt, I don't mean just in cash. I mean some people's behavior because of their disposition or their illness makes them bankrupt. They can't repay us. They can't restore what they took from us. A good example is abuse. An abuser can not pay back what was stolen from the victim. It's impossible.

And forgiveness then becomes impossible, if it means reconciliation because why would you open yourself up to this person when you need to protect yourself? And the real issue is forgiveness is not necessarily about reconciliation. And forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person who is bankrupt. It doesn't need their permission. Forgiveness is ultimately about taking the burden off my back, removing the rod that beats me, the pain that was inflicted by cancelling the debt and seeing the person as bankrupt.

But that doesn't mean you lend them more money when they're bankrupt. It means you are letting go of the affliction. And so this prayer becomes very powerful for those who find it difficult to forgive, maybe. That forgiveness is not about the other person, it's about me.

And forgive my sins as I myself forgive the debtor who cannot repay me.