

HOMILY ~ JULY 23-24, 2022

17th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

I ran across this quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. *“To be Christian without prayer is no more probable than being alive without breathing.”* I think this is very true. We just cannot be Christian without prayer. As Catholics, I think we are really good at communal prayer. We have rich traditions filled with symbolism and meaning. I think we tend to move the communal prayer into our personal prayer, when we are alone with God. We have beautiful prayers written by someone else that are very familiar, like the Rosary. There are many prayer books filled with beautiful prayers. There are many books of spiritual writings and meditations that give us something to think about. But the one thing that can strike fear in a room full of Catholics is when we ask someone if they would like to pray for the group spontaneously. Catholics generally do not like to do this.

The Gospel Reading today is all about prayer. It includes elements of the *Our Father* that we are very familiar with. When we pray the *Our Father* as a congregation, we have to pray the same words together; or we would have chaos. When we pray the *Our Father* in our personal prayer, we can also look at it as a roadmap for how we are to pray. When we begin the prayer, we address God as Father. When we are addressing a loving parent, this should be a close intimate conversation. We would not be reading something written by someone else when we are talking to a loving parent. We can speak to a loving parent from the heart. A loving parent usually knows you very intimately. God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows everything about you, and he still loves you unconditionally. This is a very intimate relationship.

We also say in the *Our Father*, *“Your kingdom come.”* God knows us better than we know ourselves; and God knows the world and all that is in it better than anyone else, he created it. What God wants for us is better than what we want for ourselves, and we need to trust God more. The Gospel also talks about persistence in prayer. Persistence is not about saying the right number of Rosaries and finally wearing God down to give you what you want. God will not hand you a snake when you ask for a fish. He will not hand you a scorpion when you ask for an egg. God will not give you something bad for you. We do not change God through prayer. God is constant and unchanging. We have to allow ourselves to be changed through prayer.

In the *Our Father* we say, *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* We need to discern each day what we need to

do that day. This is the way I look at discernment. It is a life long journey. We pick a path, and we start walking down that path. At the end of the day, we are further down that path; we have seen more of the path, and we can see more what is ahead. Each day we need to ask God: *Did I pick the right path to start down?* If not, change paths. *If I am on the right path, what do I need to do today to travel further down that path?* Some days you will meet the fork in the road. Then you need to sit with God and figure out which path you should take. This journey continues for your entire life. At the end of the journey, hopefully, we find heaven; but we will not get there until we die. We should spend our lifetime traveling the road to heaven. Sometimes we are going to get off track. If we trust in God and stay connected to him each day, we will get back on track. We will encounter many things along the way that we cannot control and we cannot anticipate. We will not always get what we want in prayer but sometimes that is the most loving thing that God can do is not give us what we ask for. The discernment process must be very closely connected with the way we are living our lives each day.

It would be nice if we could just sit down one day and God would reveal to us what we are called to do; and then we could just do it. But that is not the way God works. To begin with, if I knew everything I would have to face for the rest of my life, I probably would not get out of bed in the morning. Our lives unfold and that is the way I want it. At one point in my life, I decided that I was going to travel down the path to the priesthood. It took me several years to pick that path, but that was just the beginning of the journey and that journey did not end with ordination. I am still on the journey. Each day I need to ask God what I need to do to travel further down that path. One day I will be too old to do this anymore, and I will get to the fork in the road. I will decide what path to take with God in retirement. We can prepare for retirement financially, but having enough money to retire is not the important discernment. Finding a new purpose and meaning in retirement is the important discernment. You see, without discernment, we can make our 5 year, 10 year, 20 year, 30 year plan and stick to it. You may even get there eventually, but you will probably not be in a very good place. If I would have made this plan 30 years ago and stuck to it, I never would have ended up here. And look what I would have missed.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim