

Luke 11:1-13
Year C Pentecost 7

May the words of my mouth and the inspiration of our hearts
always be acceptable to you, Our Lord and Our Redeemer.
AMEN

Do you remember the first time you prayed? Where did it happen? Did someone teach you? What did you pray for? If you have a clear memory of that- can you recall what you felt, what you thought like in that moment. I personally do not have such a clear memory of “the first time”. I remember praying at bedtime as a child and praying in church as part of the service. I remember praying to God before tests and exams. I remember praying for my pimples to disappear from my face as a teenager. I remember praying to meet someone who would become my husband and life partner. I remember praying for a viable pregnancy and a healthy baby. In fact, I remember that praying was like begging especially in the years that I did not really know a personal relationship with God. In my years of the “Santa Claus God”. Be good- prayers are answered. Unanswered prayers meant that I was not being good enough.

My initial learnings of a prayer life included saying the Lord’s Prayer based on the words Luke describes Jesus’ using to provide a structure of prayer to Jesus’ disciples. Said often enough that even before I could read, I could participate in worship when we got to that section in the service and for sure my parents had an expectation that us kids did so repeat at that time. I remember my mom having a little book of prayers at her bedside with a Bible that she used although I don’t recall ever seeing her. She must have mimicked Jesus and went off to read scripture and to pray in solitude. And I myself, had a little small white book with children’s short prayers in it that I carried to church each week and used at bedtime. Later in life I remember that Bible being a fixture on the kitchen table and would see her reading from it. I have clear memories of sleepovers with my grandmother and hearing her pray the Lord’s Prayer at night when we were tucked into bed and then I could hear her mumbling after that when she must have been saying additional prayers that perhaps were between her and God and not for my little ears.

When my daughter, Jorja was born- I knelt by her cradle, then her crib and finally her bed each night to pray the Lord’s prayer with her followed by asking God’s blessing upon her. She too could participate in the Sunday service long before she could read with this one prayer. I taught her and myself, with the help of Christian resources how to personalize the Lord’s Prayer when praying it; to add Praise and Thanks for specific things we recognized God in , in our day, to apologize to God and ask God for God’s help in turning us into a better person and finally to ask God what we needed and according to God’s will for us. I taught her the five-finger prayer when holding your hands in prayer formation in front of you: the thumb representing the people close to you, the pointer finger for those who teach you- parents, teachers and preachers; the longest middle finger for the leaders of towns and nations and for religious leaders, the ring finger which is the weakest finger to remember the sick, the poor and those in need and for the baby finger the farthest from our heart that we must to pray for ourselves but last not first. I passed along my little white book of prayers (well duck taped, at this point) to her. And like me, she eventually was left to pray to God in solitude- to develop her own personal relationship with God. Like me, I’m sure there were many nights, perhaps even years where prayers were absent from her bedtime ritual as it was from mine. I’m certainly still not perfect at this. God does not call us to be perfect- God calls us to be in relationship with God. I’ve grown as well by praying not just at bedtime but in all circumstances and in all places. Unlike, my mother I have wrote much in the margins of my

Bible- thoughts, feelings and lessons learned from scripture. Some day, it will be gifted to Jorja when the time is right.

We all have our own prayer history, but today's reading from Luke's gospel takes us back to the beginning of praying WITH and IN Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't insist that Jesus' disciples pray rather in this reading the disciples are asking Jesus to teach them. Jesus has a prayer life, and it is important to Jesus. In Luke's gospel we alone we can read that Jesus "would withdraw to deserted areas to pray"; and at other times "he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God". Jesus prayed before Jesus choose the apostles, and when Jesus fed the five thousand; Jesus prayed the night before Jesus died and even from the cross itself. Prayer was part of Jesus' life even unto death. Jesus' disciples have watched Jesus' example and now they choose it as part of their way in life.

So, when Jesus responded to the disciples request, what Jesus taught them became important – and has remained important- for the life of the church. Jesus taught them and us how to pray to God; how to have a conversation with God and essentially how to build a relationship with God.

Being a Christian is not the same as being a disciple. Both include choice but choosing to be a Christian is based on belief and becoming a disciple takes being a Christian to another level, one that focuses more on developing and being in a relationship with God versus just believing in God. This relationship in the life of a disciple is the highest priority in our life. Its significance is greater than our relationship to our spouse, our child, our parents and our friends. When we spend effort in our relationship with God, all of our remaining relationships benefit too. When we have open, honest and a frequent relationship with God we naturally will do the same in all our other relationships.

The reading from the gospel today doesn't end there though, Jesus then moves on to the motivation for our prayers. The first parable deals with one's request of a friend and the second the request of one's parent.

The first parable teaches us a valuable lesson- to be persistent in our prayers. "So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:9-10). He, by persistently knocking, had the door opened to him. He, by boldly asking, got what he asked for. He sought and he found what he was seeking. So, too, with the disciple in his prayers. Consistent, persistent prayer, daily prayer, is to be motivated by the assurance that if a friend will give what is sought, even if inconvenient, then God will surely answer our petitions.

In the second parable, Jesus leaves the imagery of a friend and moves to that of a parent. If friends can be expected to give us what we ask for when we persist, what can one expect of a parent, better yet, of our Heavenly Parent? Jesus taught the disciples and us to pray to God as our Parent. Earthly parents love their children and delight in giving good gifts to them. They would not give their children "bad" things when they have asked for something good, nor would earthly parents give something to their children that would "harm" them when they have asked for things which they believe will "help" them. In the same way, God, as a Heavenly Parent, does not give us those things which will be harmful to us when we have asked for those things which we believe to be beneficial to us.

More than I'd like to admit sometimes, I find myself asking God for snakes and scorpions without realizing that these things are inclining me toward things which are detrimental to my spiritual life. My prayer seemingly goes unanswered or is answered in a way that I was not expecting. In my "Santa

Claus" God belief system of old, I may think I have not been good enough to get the answer which I deemed is the correct answer. However, in a world where I have developed a deep, loving and trusting relationship with my God, I can be reassured that God knows the whole picture- perhaps it is not the right time, perhaps my request is selfish and not taking into account others and the effect my request being granted would have on others in the whole picture. I however, can be sure that good has given me eggs and fish and if I accept God's will for me, all will be well.

Because God is a good God, a loving Parent, God cannot only be expected to answer our petitions, but to do so in a way that is for our highest good. From our Lord's first parable we learn that God answers our prayers. From the second, we learn that God answers are good ones even if they are not the answers we prayed for. The highest good which God gives to God's disciples who petition God in prayer is summed up in the Gift of the Holy Spirit. What better gift could our Lord give to us.

Today's reading from the gospel of Luke invites us to reflect on the story of our prayer life and where it has taken us. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who put us on the path to prayer as an essential part of our life. So, we continue to ask, Lord, teach us to pray. Teach us truly to pray the words given by your Son, calling on God as our parent and protector. We can take comfort from the fact that, even when we do not know how to pray as we ought that the Holy Spirit indwelling within in us helps us with sighs to deep for words. For our part, we continue to teach those entrusted to us to pray as Jesus taught us, confident that our prayer will find favor with our God. **AMEN.**