

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 11:1-13

***"He Is Always Listening"***

How very profound our first reading from Genesis 18 is. Abraham is saying to God, 'if you find 50 people who are faithful' and God says then He will save Sodom and Gomorrah. Then Abraham goes to 40 and then down to 30 and so on – and the faithfulness of God shines through. And then today's Holy Gospel show us the greatest example of who Jesus was and is. The Apostles saw Jesus pray and they wanted to know how to do what He did. – because they wanted to do the same. They wanted to know "how do you pray like that?" The Apostles weren't strangers to prayer, they had been praying all of their lives, praying all day long, at fixed intervals and then before and after every meal. The average Jew during the time of Jesus prayed about three to four hours a day! People today struggle to pray three or four minutes to have time with Jesus. The Apostles wanted to know what and how to do what He did, and they asked Jesus to teach them to experience the same kind of intimate relationship that Jesus had with God, the Father.

Luke 11:1-13 and Matthew 6:9-13 – shows how Jesus answered them. I want to share with you the way that they heard Jesus speak those words – in Aramaic. Jesus said, Abun di bashmayya nethqadash shmak. Tethey malkuthak. Newe tzevyanak aykan di bashmayya af ba'ara. Lakhman di sunkanan yamana hav lan yoma dheyn. Wa-shbuk lan khavine aykana, d'af hanan shbukan l'khayvine. Ulo ellan lanisyana l'heyn atzeyl lan min beesha. Amin. These words were also recorded in Ancient koine Greek in the New Testament for Luke 11:1-13 and Matthew 6:5-13. Here is my Greek New Testament – and I will read to you the prayer from Matthew: Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου· ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου· γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς· τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον· καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν· καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ. That was the written word in the first century.

So, now that you have heard this prayer as it was spoken in Aramaic and written in Greek, let me ask you - what is your goal when you pray? When you go before God and seek Him – what is your goal? Is your goal to have God grant your request? Is your goal giving God your wish list? This is not Amazon where you can build a "wish list" and hit send. You see, God knows our hearts and knows our needs even better than we do. Your prayer should be seeking to spend some time with God, in conversation with Him, and in listening to what He has to say. Remember the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 6:32-33 *"Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Trying to set aside time each day is tough, right? We all have busy schedules. There is always something going on that keeps you from spending some time with God. Just think about this:

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Imagine a football team that never practiced, a band that never tunes its instruments. A farmer who never plants any seed. A salesperson who never makes calls or goes out to meet clients or an artist who never buys any paint or canvas. To NEVER do something is the absolute worst way to ever get better at it! If we want to have a relationship – any relationship, it takes work – it takes hard work – but the reward is great! I have the privilege of meeting with people who are about to get married. We talk about relationships, and that is not easy, but it will be a lifetime of friendship and love beyond anything you have ever known before. It takes work. With prayer, the precious reward is being in the glorious presence of God the Father and we will feel His will. This reward is reserved for those who seek God’s heart – not His attention!

Are you familiar with the prayer that many people pray at dinner time? *“Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord, amen”* Very often it is prayed with speed and hardly any feeling, as folks rush to dig into their meal. I think whatever you pray that it should be heartfelt. We are not supposed to pray at length or at a speed. How many remember that 3-word prayer? “Help Me Jesus” and followed it with “Thank you Jesus” because God knows what you need. Remember, He is always listening.

The Lord’s Prayer is a very special gift that Jesus gave to us as His answer to the Apostles request for Him to teach them to pray! It was not meant to be some kind of *mantra, chant, or slogan* – but it is a three-part commitment, petition, and blessing where we make a conscious effort to invite God into our lives – to accomplish His purpose - in and through us.

When we pray *“in Jesus Name”* it means something. It means that Jesus is entering with us into the relationship with the Father, and He is bringing us along. In the letter to the Hebrews 7:25, we are reminded that *“He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”* Remember, with Jesus’ death on the cross – the Temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom, making it possible for each of us as followers of Jesus Christ, to enter into an open relationship with God, Himself, and the Holy Spirit joins us as we enter into God’s Holy Presence. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans 8:26 tells us how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

Every time you pray the words that Christ gave us, saying “Our Father” you are praying a wonderfully personal prayer that assures each one of us that we are being placed into the holy, awesome, glorious presence of God, Himself. Jesus gave us this privilege, and it cost Him everything, which is more than we could ever possibly deserve! There is a really good reason that Jesus also taught us to pray this prayer, and all of the personal pronouns within are plural! Just listen to them.

*Our Father, Our daily bread, Our debts or trespasses, Our debtors, or those who trespass against us, Lead us not into temptation, Deliver us from evil.*

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We are part of the Body of Christ - and even though we might be praying alone we must always remember that we should be praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ! Our own personal needs become opportunities to intercede for others who are going through the same or similar situations. In just a little while, Wesley will be leading us in the Prayers of the People. That is not just a dissertation folks, but a combination of all of us praying to Almighty God for one another. The Apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 5:9 “*you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*” While you are praying for yourself, please pray for someone who needs to know that God cares. Ask God to show you someone else who needs the same kind of encouragement that you receive from your relationship with Him. Remember, He is always listening!

Jesus taught us to pray by saying “*Our Father*” but if you notice in the Scriptures – He never refers to the Father any other way than “*Father, My Father, or Abba! Father!*” He invites us to share in His relationship – through Him and His sacrifice – with “*Our Father, who art in heaven.*” As a part of that relationship, Jesus shows us that “*the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*” (John 15:16)

As you start your day, each day, ask God to keep you as far away from compromising situations as possible. You know what I am talking about; gossip, improper language, indecent thoughts, and wicked web sites; I really don't think I need to go any further. How many of us when we are driving on a trip, ask God to send His holy angels to surround the car to protect us as we go, inviting Him into the relationship to protect us? You should try it - it works! God wants to take good care of us if we invite Him in. Listen to these words from 1 John 4:4 “*the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*”

In this awesome teaching about prayer, Jesus gave to His Apostles, and to us, everything we need. It covers our *past*, with forgiveness for every sin we've ever committed. It covers our *present*, our daily needs – our daily bread. It covers our *future*, deliverance from coming temptation.

And so, tomorrow, I hope you will be praying in the way that Jesus showed us, making it a clear focus, making it a kingdom focus, reminding us for whom it is that we live, pray and who we worship. I want to suggest to you that as we pray this wonderful prayer in just a few minutes during Holy Communion at the Lord's table, that you consider God's will in your life for today, and make the decision that your answer is *YES*, no matter what the question is! Remember, He is always listening.