

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 11:1-13

"The Prayer Jesus Gave Us"

You know, I just love that first reading (from Genesis 18). It is like the first version of 'Let's Make a Deal.' Abraham is saying to God, 'if you find 50 people who are faithful' and God says that He will save Sodom and Gomorrah. Then Abraham goes to 40 and then 30 – it could be Monty Hall playing Abraham, in that version of Genesis 18. Today's Holy Gospel show us the greatest example that Jesus was and is. The Apostles saw Jesus pray and they wanted to know how to do what He did. I am sure they asked Jesus many questions over the course of the three years that they were all together. All of the miracles over illness, death, and nature. They wanted to know "how do you pray like that?" The Apostles weren't strangers to prayer for they had been praying all of their lives. They prayed 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! Can you imagine that? I think in today's day and age, people struggle to pray three or four minutes to have time with Jesus. What they wanted to know was what and how to do what He did, and they asked Jesus to teach them was to experience the intimate relationship, the same kind of intimate relationship that Jesus had with God, the Father.

Today's Gospel from Luke 11:1-13 which is also told in Matthew 6:5-13 – shows how Jesus answered them. Before we look more closely at Jesus' answer to them we need to ask ourselves:

- 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?

If so, I have bad news for you! God does not exist so that He can give us what we want. God knows our hearts. God knows our needs even better than we do! Instead, I want to suggest to you this morning, that your prayer should be seeking to spend time with God, in conversation with, and in listening to what He has to say to us. It may not be that God says to you "Build Me and ask!" It is not going to be like that. It might very well be that your heart tells you that you need to forgive somebody, or that you need to love somebody more, or that you need to be a better person; a better dad, a better mom, a better grandma – or maybe to just keep doing what you are doing. God doesn't always want to shake us and say 'hey, you need to do this' but He might be telling you 'you know, you are a pretty good person.' 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.*" We should not be praying to inform God, He already knows - but to get to enjoy true intimacy with Him, and to spend time listening to what He has to say to us. It is ironic, when you are driving to Pennsylvania and you are going five and a half hours. And then eight and a half hours the next day – and it is just you, your wife and the dog in the car – you get to talk a lot and you get to listen a lot – and sometimes there is a whole bunch of silence. And – you get to pray a lot too. It is great intimacy, and you'd be surprised at what the dog has to say (laugh). When he crosses his eyes you know that you have got to stop.

Trying to set aside time each day is tough, right? We have busy schedules. If you are a teacher – you have got to do this, this and this on time, and then you have papers to correct, and then plans. You know you did your plan book, but now you have to know what you are going to do and how you are going to do it. Maybe you are a businessperson and you have got a meeting the next day, that is ultimately the most important meeting that you have had all year. You have got to prepare for that. There is always something going on that keeps you from spending some time with God. Just think about this:

- Imagine a football team that never practices,
- An orchestra or band that never tunes its instruments – that must be a wild one – sounds like Jack Benny.
- A farmer who never plants any seed – what are you going to get? A lot of weeds.
- A salesperson who never makes calls or goes out to meet clients
- An artist who never purchases any paint

To NEVER do something is the absolute worst way to ever get better at it! If we are to have a relationship – any relationship, for example a marriage, – it takes work – it takes hard work – but the reward is great!

I met with three young people in my office yesterday. I met with Andrew Deas, his sister Courtney, and his sister Deanna. Their dad, Claude Wayne Deas passed away on Monday. His memorial service is today at 2 PM., right here in the church, followed by the graveside service. They were telling me that the most important thing in their dad's life was relationships. Not only with them, but with other people. He was well respected, called Brother Deas by some and brother Wayne by others, using his middle name. It is just amazing of the relationships, and they said that it is because of him that they came to Christ, because of his example, because of the love that he shared and because of the relationship that he showed them, a relationship that was with Jesus.

With prayer, the precious reward is being in the glorious presence of God the Father, and that is where Wayne is right now, with his wife (Mary) Jo. We will celebrate that today at 2 o'clock. This reward is reserved for those who seek God's heart – not His attention!

Are you familiar with the prayer that many 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 those chicken fingers, pulled pork or whatever. I think whatever you pray that it is heartfelt. We are not supposed to pray at length or at a speed. How many remember that 3-word prayer? “Help Me Jesus” which Rowan prayed all the time and followed it with “Thank you Jesus” because God knows what you need.

Have you ever stopped to really think what Christ was saying in Luke 11:2-4 or Matthew 6:9-13? This 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 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.

Have you ever had to make an important phone call, speech, or even give your testimony, and you spent quite a bit of time planning and rehearsing how to begin; what to say and how to say it. How much care and preparation do we take in thinking about what we will say, and how little we plan and prepare to speak with the King of the Universe? When we enter into prayer with God it is a privilege – made possible only by virtue of the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. 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 – 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 relational prayer that assures each one of us that we are being placed into the holy, awesome, glorious presence of God. Jesus gave us this privilege – and it cost Him everything – which is more than we could ever deserve! There is a really good reason that Jesus also taught us to pray this prayer, and all of the personal pronouns 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*

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 – or as 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 – 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.

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

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share in that 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)

In today’s Holy Gospel – Jesus gives us a parable about an unexpected guest who drops in on a man and his family late at night. He caught them unaware and unprepared - without enough food to give their guest. His host snuck over to his friend’s house, knocked on the door, asking for three loaves of bread. In Luke 11:8-10 Jesus shows us that His relationship with the man and this fellow’s persistence eventually pays off as Our Lord says “*I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. "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.*”” This man was in need, and he knew exactly where to go for help. We know that we can do the same. However, we are called not to focus on the gift, or our needs, but on God - Jehovah Jireh – my provider – who gives good gifts!

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 don’t think I need to go on. 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? It works! God wants to take good care of us – if we invite Him in. Remember the 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.
- It covers our *future* – deliverance from coming temptation.

And so, tomorrow, praying in the way that Jesus showed us, make 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 prayer in just a few minutes during Holy Communion at the Lord’s table, and each day – that you consider God’s will in your life for today – and decide that your answer is *YES*, no matter what the question is!