

- We assume that the disciples were largely raised within Judaism, just like Jesus. Surely, then, they were *already* acquainted with prayer. So, *why would they ask Jesus to teach them to pray? ... And why would Luke tell us something that might be safely assumed, that Jesus was praying?* Further, *if* prayer was already familiar to the disciples, we should then ask, "*But, what kind of prayer?*" For Luke wants us to perceive that something was *different* about *the way* Jesus prayed.
- Luke tells us that "*Jesus was praying in a certain place.*" The disciples surely noticed that *Jesus often prayed in private*. Corporate worship is public, and it engages a community in various forms of prayer and praise. *But*, for the disciples, Jesus modeled a form of prayer that is typically private. Luke tells us that Jesus would often "withdraw to deserted places and pray."¹ Mark tells us about a time when Jesus got up very early, long before daylight, to pray in a lonely place by himself.² Luke also tells us how Jesus went out to a mountain and spent the whole night in prayer before calling the twelve to join him.³ These stories tell us that, for Jesus, prayer was a way to *feed himself spiritually*. And through it, *he re-grounded himself in mission*.
- In today's Gospel, having set his face toward Jerusalem, Jesus is praying by himself. Perhaps his words are like his later prayer on the cross: "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*"⁴ In other words, in both *living* and in *dying*, Jesus was in the habit of saying to the Father, '*I put my whole being into your hands.*'
- How fitting, then, that a disciple boldly says, "*Lord - Teach us to pray!*"⁵ Well, *who* do we typically ask, to teach us things we want to learn? Of course, we ask someone *who knows about* the subject. Indeed, we are likely to ask someone who not only *knows about* the matter, and who actually *lives* it. On occasion, *Jesus may have prayed like other rabbis*. Yet the disciples noticed that he also prayed *differently* and, probably, more *sincerely* and more

deeply. Luke among the Gospels is most clear that Jesus embodied and modeled *a life of prayer*, not just the *occasional practice* of it. Here, it's helpful to remember what our Prayer Book Catechism teaches us about prayer ~ that "prayer is *responding to God*." The kind of prayer that Jesus *lived and modeled* was at least this, a genuine and intentional process of responding to God.

- What a wonderful thing for them to ask ~ '*O Lord, please teach us to pray!*' For prayer is something at which all of us are *just beginners*. Jesus honors their request by teaching them "the Lord's Prayer." The contemporary form in our Prayer Book is based on how Luke shares it. *Jesus teaches us to speak to God directly, as Father*. In this prayer, we speak *with* Jesus, and *through* Jesus, as he shares with us *his own relationship* with the Father. Therefore, *his* Father becomes "*our*" Father. Jesus underscores the personal nature of our new relationship with the Father, by saying, "*Father, hallowed be your name*." As Moses learned in the wilderness, the holiness of God's *name* is directly connected with the holiness of God's *being*. Through the prayer Jesus teaches us, we begin to live into a new personal relationship with God.
- So, what does Jesus teach us to ask for *first*? It's what we usually ask for *last*! "*Your kingdom come*." We are much more likely to ask God for *something else*, that '*our*' *kingdoms* come first! Yet, he teaches us to say, 'O God, *your* kingdom come.' Meaning, '*your* sovereignty, O Father; *and* your purposes for the world *before* anything else - and especially before *my* will, *my* purposes and *my* needs.' *These come second* to our Father's purposes. Hence, the second petition he teaches us asks for God's will to be done on earth, in our lives, just as it is done in the new creation.
- Here we gain insight about why Jesus so often prayed alone, and early in the morning. It does not come as naturally to us, as it did for him, to put our

Father and his will *first thing* in the day. But *when we follow Jesus, and put prayer first in the day, we put our Father and his will first in the day.* Jesus teaches us a fundamental principle of prayer. *From him we learn that the purpose of prayer is to bend our will until it comes into conformity with God's will.* The purpose of prayer is *not* to try and bend God's will so that it fits our own, and our personal desires.

- If praying that God's kingdom be made present, and that God's will be done, are *the first things for which we are to ask*, what are we to ask for *next*? *We are to pray for our daily bread.* Jesus teaches us to pray for simple sustenance, that our basic needs will be met. In other words, *before* we pray for what we *want*, we pray for *what we need*. And we pray for what we need *only after* we put God's will *first*. This helps us see that *what we need is dependent on God's will coming first*. Jesus does *not* teach us to ask for strength so that we can put *our* will into effect. *He teaches us to ask for help in putting God's will into effect, as of first importance in our lives.*
- *These first three requests that Jesus teaches us, have to do with dependence and deference, which are hard for us.* We are not temperamentally inclined to *rely on* others, or *give way* to them. It is even *more difficult* for us to give way to, and then rely on, our Heavenly Father. Yet, once we learn to put God *first -or at least a bit closer to first than before-* then we are more able to defer to God's will and God's ways. This helps us depend more on God's leading and guiding, and God's gracious provision for our lives. *As this happens, we become more aware of our own inadequacy, and of the ways we fall short and offend.* We are moved to name and set aside our sins. And so, *asking our Father to forgive our sins follows directly from wanting God's will to come first.* When we become sensitive to how God forgives our sins, especially when we ask, we can't help but forgive others who offend us.

- The last sentence in Luke's version of Jesus' prayer helps correct an impression created by the corresponding phrase in Matthew's version. For God *never leads* people into temptation. God may *allow* us to be tempted; but God *never leads* us into temptation. Asking God to "save us from the time of trial" is to ask God to preserve us from occasions where we might be tempted to deny his place in our lives. It is to keep us safe from renouncing our faith because of persecution. If we put our Father *first*, the *last* thing we will want is to allow a *lesser being*, or a *lesser thing*, take God's place in our lives. Those lesser beings include tyrants and dictators, and those lesser things include luxuries and privileges.
- When we *sincerely pray* the prayer Jesus teaches us, we become able to live as Paul urges us to live. He says we should live lives "rooted and built up in [Christ Jesus] and established in the faith,... abounding in thanksgiving." When we earnestly pray to our Father, He pours himself into our conscious experience through Christ, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Why would we ever want *anything else*?



Stanley Spencer, *Christ in the Wilderness: Driven By the Spirit*

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Notes:

¹ Luke 5:16.

² Mark 1:35.

³ Luke 6:12-13.

⁴ See Luke 23:46.

⁵ Note the Rite I invitation to the Lord's Prayer: "And now, as our Savior Christ hath taught us, we are *bold* to say, *Our Father...*"