

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Edward Sellner

ALL: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. (*Knock.*)

LEADER: Loving God, we gather to thank you for the gift of Jesus in our lives. He is the one who teaches us how to pray.

ALL: Teach us to pray, and to persist in our prayers. (*Knock.*)

LEADER: Help us to keep your name holy.

ALL: Teach us to pray, and to persist in our prayers. (*Knock.*)

LEADER: May your kingdom come, and may you give us each day our daily bread.

ALL: Teach us to pray, and to persist in our prayers. (*Knock.*)

LEADER: Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

ALL: Teach us to pray, and to persist in our prayers. (*Knock.*)

When my 18-year-old son, Daniel Patrick, was about to leave for an adventure with a friend in California, I asked him if he would join me at the prayer-shrine in my study.

I lit the candles at the shrine which contains pictures of our family, those living

and dead, and statues of Jesus, Mary, and certain saints whom I love. On this occasion each of us, father and son, prayed for a safe journey, and gave thanks for our mutual love.

I was particularly anxious about Daniel and his friend Marty being on their own for a while, concerned for their welfare, but also aware that my son was reaching a new and necessary stage of greater independence. So I gave him a cross on a chain that I had worn, hugged him, and silently asked God to protect this son whom I loved with all my heart.

It was a very simple and spontaneous ritual, but one that evidently meant something to each of us, for when

Daniel returned (thank God, unharmed!), he told me that he'd worn the chain and cross all the while he was away, even when he was having two tattoos painfully imprinted on his biceps!

We pray for all kinds reasons. Sometimes we pray because we are in need of God's help, as I did when I was concerned about my son's safety. Sometimes we pray because we are grateful for a gift received or for a day in which we seem particularly blessed.

Sometimes, when filled with regret or remorse, we seek forgiveness because of the harm we have caused or the loving action we have failed to do. Sometimes we pray just because we want to worship and honor a loving, all-compassionate holy God. For whatever reason, Jesus encouraged his followers—and encourages us today—to persist, to not give up, to keep asking.

● What family rituals or prayers do you have that express gratitude, that celebrate the good times and bad, our need to forgive each other as we seek forgiveness ourselves?

● How often do you pray?

● For what reasons?



GOSPEL

Jesus teaches us to persist in prayer.

NARRATOR: Now once he was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said:

DISCIPLE: Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.

JESUS 1: Say this when you pray: Father, may your name be held holy; your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test.

NARRATOR: Jesus also said to them.

JESUS 2: Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him;" and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not

bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you." I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it him for friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants.

JESUS 2: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11.1-13



relationship with God as we would a close friend or a loving parent. Friendship and parenthood are, in fact, *the* metaphors Jesus uses to explain prayer in the gospel story for today. And he tells us, keep asking; keep searching; keep knocking. God will hear our prayer and will respond, often in totally unexpected ways.

● What is your relationship with God in prayer? Do you see God as a friend, a loving parent, a lover? How do you describe God to your children or grandchildren?

● What stories do you tell others of how you came to believe in God's loving response to you?

● When has an unanswered prayer become a source of gratitude?

To pray that God's name be hallowed and that God's kingdom come is to acknowledge that all barriers to love must be dissolved. Anything that separates race from race, rich from poor, gender from gender, age group from age group, Christian from non-Christian is a barrier to the holiness God wishes to share with believers. Biases have no place in the community that names God our father.

Jesus also calls us in Sunday's gospel to persevere in prayer. God is more gracious than a friend who reluctantly gets up in the night to help us. But

Jesus envisions a just and loving society.

The one prayer that Jesus specifically taught, the *Our Father*, contains many reasons for praying. Jesus asks us to address God as we would a loving parent, and to honor God's name.

Jesus encourages us to pray for "the kingdom," the vision he has of a just and loving society and world. He says it's okay, too, to pray for our very human needs: for bread, for food to

nourish us, for food to eat and food to share. Most especially, he suggests that we ask for forgiveness of our sins, and that we might forgive others as God forgives us.

This great prayer we can say together with others or when we are alone with God, but it reminds us that all prayer is quite simply about communication, the attempt to maintain an intimate



Abraham affirms God's judgment.

Sunday's first reading is among the sagas of Abraham and Sarah in the first book of the bible. The story affirms the justice of God, a justice that does not arbitrarily punish and reward. It characterizes Abraham as a friend-servant who receives privileged information concerning the intent of his God.

Abraham and his wife Sarah are the earliest ancestors of the people of Israel. Abraham is privy in Sunday's reading to God's intent to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. God dialogues with Abraham as with a friend.

Abraham bargains with God to reduce the number of people God will punish, but each time he suggests a lesser number he also affirms the justice and judgments of God. People who do evil and people who do good in God's eyes will be dealt with as their lives deserve.

God's graciousness does not guarantee that we get what we think we want. We may not receive what we ask for; we may instead discover more than we were looking for or be surprised at what's behind the door on which we are knocking.

God gives us what we need, a mystery that we see best in retrospect. Jesus calls us in Sunday's gospel to long-range perseverance in prayer that enters into the mystery of faith.

● Are you sometimes afraid of asking God for certain things; are you unwilling to trust that, as a friend, God will hear your

prayers, however unimportant they might seem?

● Who is someone with whom you are angry or hurt, holding resentments, perhaps buried for a long time? Are you open to pray for that person, open to letting go and moving on?

● Are you willing to seek forgiveness from someone with whom you are estranged?

● Are you willing in some way to bring into your life, your home, your community those who are neglected, ill-treated, marginalized, strangers?

How should a just God act?

NARRATOR: When the three visitors to Abraham's tent went toward Sodom, God remained standing before Abraham.

GOD: The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against

DO SOMETHING

**C
H
A
R
I
T
Y**

**J
U
S
T
I
C
E**

- Practice welcoming Sabbath. Take your children or grandchildren picking berries, wild or farmer grown. Make a pie together.
- Share your extra produce with a food shelf—lettuce, peas, beans, strawberries, tomatoes. Plan a garden tour with other families. Have each family make a dish from a fruit or vegetable they grow.

them that comes to me. I mean to find out.

NARRATOR: Abraham drew near God.

ABRAHAM: Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were 50 innocent people in the city. Will you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the 50 innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty, so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?

GOD: If I find 50 innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

ABRAHAM: See how I am presuming to speak to my God, though I am but dust and ashes! What if there are five less than 50 innocent people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?

GOD: I will not destroy it if I find 45 there.

ABRAHAM: What if only 40 are found there?

GOD: I will forbear doing it for the sake of the 40.

ABRAHAM: Let not my God grow impatient if I go on. What if only 30 are found there?

GOD: I will forbear doing it if I can find but 30 there.

ABRAHAM: Since I have thus dared to speak to my God, what if there are no more than 20?

GOD: I will not destroy it for the sake of the 20.

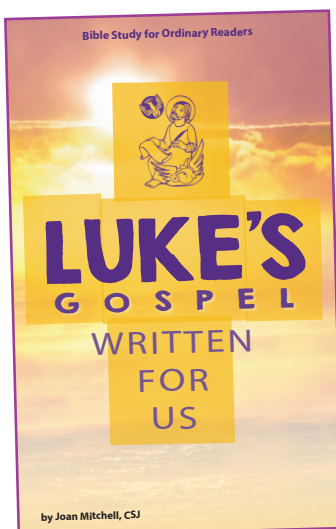
ABRAHAM: Please, let not my God grow angry if I speak up this last time. What if there are at least 10 there?

GOD: For the sake of those 10, I will not destroy it.

Genesis 18.20-32

- What memory do you have of attempts to barter or bargain with God?
- How has your prayer changed as you have matured?

Look Ahead to a Fall Bible Study



You have been enjoying Luke's Gospel this summer. The good news is we continue reading from Luke all the way to Advent. Why not start a group that can read and study Luke together? It will make Sunday Eucharist much more meaningful and deepen your relationships with your fellow Bible students.

Sister Joan's book on Luke is short (nine chapters), easy to use, and inexpensive. Go to goodgroundpress.com to read sample chapters. Then find a few others who want to make Luke's story about a compassionate and inclusive Jesus more alive in their lives.

1-9 copies, \$10.00 each; 10-99, \$8.00; 100 or more, \$7.00.

You can order online or call us at 800-232-5533.

PRAY

Ask God's help for recognizing and responding to personal and family needs. God is always there for us. Sometimes the things we think are most trivial or unimportant are the things that keep us off-center or feeling crazy. Bring these things to God. Nothing is too trivial. At the same time, do not forget to express your reasons for gratitude, for whom and for what is in your life.

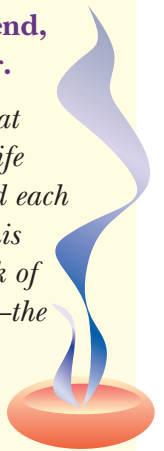
LEADER: Loving God, teach us to pray and to persist in our prayers.

ALL: Help us to reflect in our lives your own loving concern, compassion, and forgiveness.

Take turns making petitions, responding to each:

ALL: Hear us, Lord; respond to us as Friend, Caring Parent, Lover.

Join to pray the prayer at the heart of Christian life by forming a circle, and each turning, and putting his or her hand on the back of the person to the right—the back side of the heart. Pray the Our Father together.



Edward Sellner, Ph.D., is professor professor emeriti, St. Catherine University, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota, and author of numerous books, including Great Monastic Values for Today; Wisdom of the Celtic Saints; The Double: Male Eros, Friendship, and Mentoring.