

**ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi
OSM**

Lk 11.1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

And 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 who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him 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!"

We received the Our Father in three different versions, that of Matthew, that of Luke and the one in the first catechism of the church, called the Didache, that is "the teaching".

Probably – and we are going to see it – that of Luke’s Gospel is the oldest, for it was usual for writers to add something to the words of Jesus, but never to remove or cut. As we shall see, the version of Luke is the shortest. So maybe we are in front of the original prayer taught by Jesus.

What is the context? “*Jesus was praying in a certain place*”. Luke the evangelist is the one who introduces a praying Jesus, more than others, but never in synagogues or temples. When Jesus goes into a temple is to teach, and teaching means to free people from religious doctrine that was imposed on them, to let them receive the love of the Father, shifting from obedience to law, to the receiving of his love.

Well, disciples don’t ask Jesus to teach them how to pray and they even don’t pray with him, but they want a prayer like the one that John the Baptist taught his disciples, one that distinguishes them from others.

Well Jesus doesn’t provide rules, formulas or timetables, but a lifestyle. Let’s see it.

First, in order to address to God, no religious formula is needed, such as “Most High, Mighty, etc”. But the community of followers call upon God as “Father”. God doesn’t require incensing priests, nor pious believers, but sons. Father, in the ancient culture, is the one who conveys to his son his entire existence throughout his life. So we recognize God as the source of life, addressing to him as “Father”.

The first request is “*Hallowed be your name*”. this verb “to hallow” means “to consecrate”, that is acknowledging the value of something. So the community through this prayer taught by Jesus says “be this name of yours recognized”, that is God has to be seen as a Father and the one Jesus introduces is a Father whose love doesn’t distinguish between good and bad, but is poured on everyone. This Father doesn’t care about merits of people, but cares about their needs.

So Jesus exhorts his community to pray “this is the name by which you must be recognized as a Father”, not a God who rewards and punishes, one to fear, but a Father whose love is unconditional.

Then comes another request, and it is not exactly “*Your Kingdom come*” but the verb means “your Kingdom be extended”. Since there is a community of disciples who accepted the beatitudes of Jesus, Kingdom of God is already there. For “Kingdom of God” obviously doesn’t refer to a geographic place but to a community where God doesn’t rule through laws that people shall obey, but through conveying his Spirit, his own loving ability.

We said that the Our Father has three different versions, well all of them contain a Greek term that in Greek language is absent, and we still don’t know what it exactly means. “*Give us each day our daily bread ...*”, Jerome, the first great translators of Gospels, translated this term in Matthew’s Gospel with “supersubstantial”, that is one bread that goes far beyond substance, while in Luke’s Gospel he translated with “daily”. Liturgy chose that of Matthew’s, but replaced the term “supersubstantial” with the easier “daily” which nevertheless creates confusion as if we should ask God for break.

Jesus clearly said: *“Do not seek what you are to eat”*. So this bread that goes beyond the substance, who is it? It's Jesus figure as he is the source of life for a community; source of life as the Word and in the Eucharist as bread.

Then comes the request to forgive sins and offences of men, motivated by the fact that not offences or sins are canceled but real debts of debtors.

Here it just refers to material debts. One community that received and welcomed Beatitudes cannot be formed by debtors and creditors, but by brothers who share what they have with each other. Therefore the proof, the guarantee to be right with God, that God is with us, is that there are no debtors and creditors, but only brothers.

And finally the last request is *“don't leave us in temptation”*, literally “in trials”. Which is this trial that the community fears of? The one in which it has fallen. On the Mount of Olives Jesus asked his disciples to stay with him, pray with him and be next to him for the moment of his capture and death, and all of them failed.

So the community, being aware of this, asks not to be abandoned in the moment of persecution and trial. And all Jesus' teaching goes on exhorting people to completely trust the Father, by multiplying the verbs three times – number three indicates what is full and definitive – says *“everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened”*.

He means a total trust in the Lord, but Jesus also teaches what shall be asked in order to be sure to be heard. *“If you then, who are evil”*, evil in the relationship with the Father, *“ 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!”*

Well, here Jesus guarantees what is given through prayer. What is the Holy Spirit? It's the strength needed in order to fulfill the Father's plan. As already said God rules not through laws, but fully conveying his Spirit.

Then Jesus guarantees that this call for the Spirit will definitely be answered. All others have already been answered, for the Father, who is good to his sons, cares about them even before they go and ask him.