

ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 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!”

The only prayer taught by Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, comes to us in three different versions. This is because the evangelists did not intend to convey the exact words of Jesus, but its profound meaning. We have a longer version of the Our Father in Matthew, then a shorter version, this one by Luke that we will now comment on in chapter 11, and then in the first catechism of the church called Didache, a Greek word meaning "teaching" .

But despite being different these three versions all contain a mystery that we will now try to face.

Let's read this unique prayer taught by Jesus and see its importance. Jesus to the disciples who ask him to teach them to pray says: “*When you pray, say: “Father, ...”*

Speaking to God he does not address him using those liturgical ceremonial forms in which God was exalted with all his names (like “holiness”) No. Jesus turns to God calling him Father, because this is the relationship he came to inaugurate with his disciples: the relationship of a father with a child.

And keeping in mind that in that culture the father is the one who transmits life, so it is the source of life. And the first request made: “*..hallowed be your name.*” The verb “to hallow” has the meaning of consecrating, separating, but when it is addressed to God it means recognizing what he is. So the first request that the community of believers makes to the Father is “let his name be recognized”, meaning, that people know you as a Father, and in this passage of the Gospel Jesus will say that the Father meets the needs of his children, the Father even precedes them because the Father has at heart the life and happiness of his children. Then the community asks that this your name, - Father - with which we have known you and that we are experiencing, is recognized.

Another petition: “*Your kingdom come.*” This it does not mean asking for something that is not there and therefore it must come, the meaning of the verb is “extend, expand your kingdom”. The kingdom of the Father is already here. Jesus, in proclaiming the beatitudes and proclaimed the poor blessed because the kingdom of God is for them. The kingdom of God is not the afterlife, but an alternative society where instead of accumulating for oneself one generously shares with others, where instead of commanding, one serves.

Then, through fidelity to the beatitudes, the community asks that this experience of the kingdom be extended. And here in the middle there is a difficult-to-translate verse, because it contains a Greek word that simply does not exist in the Greek language. This is what we translate with “*Give us each day our daily bread,..*” The evangelist writes - I will try to translate literally from the text - “our bread that ...” and then there is this Greek word that does not exist in the Greek language ... “give it to us every day”.

St. Jerome, the first translator of the gospel, faced with this term that does not exist in the Greek language, made a choice. In the Gospel of Matthew he translated it as “super-super-stantialem”, which means a bread that goes beyond substance (supernatural). Luke in his gospel translated it as “daily”. Then the church in the liturgical version chose Matthew's version, but instead of super-super-stantialem, difficult to pronounce and to understand, he put for us daily.

It is a choice that causes so much damage, because with this choice it almost seems that we should ask God for bread to eat, the bread that nourishes men. No, the bread that nourishes men is the task of men to procure it and share it with those who have none. This is a special bread because it is requested of God. Probably the translation “super-super-stantialem” was the exact one. What is this bread? This bread is the presence of Jesus at the centre of the community, as it is at the centre of the Our Father, Jesus as food, as a word that nourishes life and as bread, the bread of the Eucharist that gives us the strength to live this word. Therefore bread is not required. Jesus had said: “Do not worry, do not be anxious about what you will eat or what you will drink! The gentiles think about these things. If it is asked of God it is because it is the presence of the Lord as a food of life.

Then the clause: “*..forgive us..*” literally cancel “*..our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*” God forgives us, but his forgiveness becomes effective and operative in the moment that it becomes forgiveness for others.

Then the last of the invocations, this too badly translated, especially in Matthew's gospel and has caused many problems ... the famous “*And lead us not into temptation.*”

What is this test to which the community asks not to be abandoned? It is the test in which he failed. Jesus in the garden of olives had asked the disciples: “*Watch and pray that you may not enter into*

temptation. "(Matt.26,41). The proof was that of Jesus who was captured as a criminal, who ended up murdered as a criminal, as one cursed by God, a test that put the community in crisis. Then Jesus asks the community in this prayer to ask to remain strong in the moment of trial, in the moment of this temptation.

Then the passage ends with full trust in the Lord and above all with a very important aspect: the only thing that Jesus guarantees, that will be given, is normally the one that is least asked for in the list, in the prayer lists. In fact the passage ends by saying: "*If you then, who are evil,..*" not to say that we are evil, but to compare the goodness of the Father to our attitude towards others he says that we are evil, "*..know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit..*" literally the Holy Spirit without the article, because it does not give the fullness of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit to the extent that the person is able to welcome it. "*..to those who ask him!*"

Here is the only thing that Jesus guarantees that the Father will give. The Holy Spirit. What is this Spirit for? The Spirit is the strength of God's love that serves to carry out the Father's plan of love for each of us. Because God does not govern men by issuing laws that they must observe, but communicating to them his Spirit, the inner energy that makes us understand the way to go.