

I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it.

John Wesley, 1703–91

Related topics

For further study:

Prayer; trust; suffering; images of God

Closing Prayer

Provident Father,
with the prayer your Son taught us always on our lips,
we ask, we seek, we knock at your door.

In our every need,
grant us the first and best of all your gifts,
the Spirit who makes us your children.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Collect for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C ³

³ *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for years A, B and C from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1997.*

Proper 12

(Sunday between 24 and 30 July inclusive) • Ordinary Time,
Week 17

Principal Service readings

Genesis 18.20-32	Abraham intercedes for Sodom
Psalms 138	Hymn of thanksgiving
Colossians 2.6-15[16-19]	Live according to true faith, not false teaching
Luke 11.1-13	The Lord's prayer; parable of the persistent friend

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The Lord's Prayer

¹ 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.' ² He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

The importunate friend

⁵ 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;

⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him."

⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.

Effective prayer

⁹ ‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³ 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!’

Luke 11.1-13 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

‘Prayer is as important to spiritual life as air is to physical life.’ Do you agree? How important is prayer? The disciples of Jesus don’t just want to know more about prayer they want to know how to use it: ‘Teach us to pray’. Do you feel like that too?

The Lord’s Prayer is the most famous of prayers. It is brought into use in all sorts of places. Think where it comes in church services and where else it might be used. What does it signify in each of these places?

We get used to the opening, ‘Our Father’, but the prayer immediately draws us into relationship in God’s family – with him and with each other. What does relating to God as Father mean? What does the fact that another person speaks of God as ‘Father’ mean to us?

The petition, ‘Your kingdom come’, seems to colour the remaining requests. Our ‘daily bread’ has been taken to mean ‘spiritual bread’ even ‘spiritual manna at the heavenly banquet’, rather than simply physical food. Do you think this is what Jesus meant?

Forgiveness is not just in the hands of God, but in our own hands too. One of the introductions to the confession at the Eucharist quotes the

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

words of Jesus: ‘Before you offer your gift, go and be reconciled.’² How seriously do we take these words?

The ‘time of trial’ is a potential future event. Is this to be understood as a personal trial for the individual that might be avoided, or as the inevitable final battle between good and evil from which protection is sought?

The Lord’s Prayer, as Luke gives it, is quite short, but the next parable indicates that there should be persistence in prayer. These two things seem contradictory; how might they be harmonised?

There are several lessons that can be drawn from these two parables: (a) God answers prayer; (b) God gives good things; (c) God gives more than we can ask. Can you give them an order of importance?

Quotations

1

The nature of the Trinity is one in three; it is God; but that which makes the unity is the Father, from whom and to whom the order of persons runs its course, not in such a way that the nature is confused, but that it is possessed without distinction of time or of will or of power.

St Gregory of Nazianzus, c.325–c.389

2

You cannot say the Lord’s prayer, and even once say ‘I’.
You cannot pray the Lord’s prayer, and even once say ‘my’.
Nor can you pray the Lord’s prayer and not pray for another.
For to ask for ‘our’ daily bread, you include your sister and brother!
All God’s children are included in each and every plea.
From the beginning to the end of it, it does not once say ‘me’.

author unknown

3

This is our Lord’s will ... that our prayer and our trust be, alike, large.

Julian of Norwich, c.1342–c.1417

² *Common Worship*, supplementary texts, penitential material, p.275.