

PENTECOST: SHARING NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 25, 2010

Genesis 18:20-32

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6-15 [16-19]

Luke 11:1-13

Asking, Seeking, and Knocking

Prayer is an act of worship and an acknowledgment of the presence of God. In the oldest available Greek manuscripts of the Lukan “Lord’s Prayer,” God is simply addressed as “Father.” God is indeed the greatest Father who provides the greatest of divine gifts to those who are persistent in their prayers.

In Luke 11 when Christ’s disciples ask him to teach them how to pray, he gives them the outline that we know as the “Lord’s Prayer.” He follows this with a parable and instructions he wants them to follow when making requests of God. Jesus encourages his disciples to be relentless in asking. God’s gracious, loving nature as “the heavenly Father” suggests that we are expected to do as the apostle Paul charges the Philippians, “Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart” (4:6, *GNT*).

In our Christian lives it is not merely sufficient that we ask God for all our daily needs; we must make every effort to earnestly seek him and live in his presence. As the apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Colossians, “Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving” (2:6-7, *GNT*).

On a day-to-day basis, we encounter situations where we seemingly have no way forward – all our options appear futile, our pathways blocked. At such times, when everything looks lost, we need to strive all the more with earnestness and zeal. This is when we need to knock, seeking and asking for admission. We should never think of this as a matter of talking, begging or threatening God into giving us what we want. He is a God who has promised, and from whom comes “every good gift and every perfect present” (James 1:17, *GNT*). He will never give us anything that contravenes his righteous character.

Jesus uses two illustrations to make his point. If a friend will eventually relent and meet the needs of one who continues to implore him for assistance, and if an earthly father will supply good food for his children, Jesus asks, how much more will the far-superior heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who persist in their supplications?

God is available to us in our needs at any and every hour. “Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you (Luke 11:9, *GNT*). Lord, teach us so to pray. Amen!

Today’s Reflection was prepared by Tenny Thomas, a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He also serves as a consultant for the American Bible Society in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Mexico – with thanks to God for distribution of *Jonah* in Sign Language, and extensive work among indigenous people including: FCBH resources in four languages, print and audio Portions of *Ruth* and *Esther* in another language, and 60,000 children now literate thanks to Scripture-based learning resources; and with prayers for wisdom for the General Secretary and staff, and funding for work among street children, the visually impaired and other needy people; **Cuba** – with thanks to God for the many of all ages who want to read the Bible; and with prayers for enough Bibles imported through the Council of Churches to meet needs, contribute to the growth of the Gospel and foster values among Cuban families and society; **Panama** – with thanks to God for new premises; and with prayers for an increase in new donors, new opportunities for distribution, a conference center, and completion of the Kuna translation.

Activity Corner: “Open Door” Prayer

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper (white and assorted colors); pens or pencils; scissors, glue or paste.

Read Luke 11:1-13 and identify and discuss what this passage teaches us about the “fatherhood” of God and how God’s love is defined by Jesus in terms of compassion, generosity, care, and faithfulness. Compare the prayer Jesus taught (Luke 11:1-4) with Matthew’s version of this same prayer (6:9-13). How are they the same? How are they different? What does this prayer teach us about God?

On sheets of construction paper, invite everyone to trace the outline of a door (approximately 7-1/2” by 9”). Cut out the “door” and affix one side of the “door” (about 1/2”) to a sheet of white paper, so that it can be “opened” from one side. Open or fold back the door. Above the door, ask everyone to copy Luke 11:9; below the door, copy Colossians 4:2. On the “inside,” encourage everyone to compose their own prayer, expressing thankfulness for ways in which they have experienced God’s love, care, compassion, generosity, faithfulness. Gather together and invite everyone to share their prayer. Conclude by reading together Psalm 138 and praying the “Lord’s Prayer” in the words of your own faith tradition.