

Lord's Prayer-2020

Today we want to focus for a few moments on prayer. But not just any prayer; we are focusing on a prayer from the lips of Jesus. Today's gospel is often referred to as the "real" Lord's Prayer. It is the one that Jesus prays for the apostles, his disciples, and for us. Jesus is about to depart from them, and He reviews everything that He has taught them and answers all their questions. There was only one more thing He could do for them.

HE PRAYED FOR THEM. In their presence Jesus prayed, thanking God for His friends, and praying for their well-being. Jesus' prayer was startling, breathtaking. Having learned so much from Jesus as they traveled with him for the better part of three years, perhaps what stuck with the apostles most was how he prayed. At one point they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray like he did. And you will recall that Jesus taught them a model prayer that we know today as the Lord's Prayer. But in that day before his crucifixion, Christ prayed for His friends. It is always reassuring when we are going through difficult times to know that someone else is praying for us, someone is keeping us safe.

Several years ago, after a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their assessment of the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, with her wings wide apart on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise.

“She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had scorched her small body, the mother had remained steadfast, because she had been willing to die, so those under the cover of her wings would live...”

Like the mother bird, Jesus willingly stretched out his hands and died in order to secure eternal life for his followers. He was aware of his betrayal, abuse, mockery of a trial, and his cruel death. What was on his mind as he saw the end approaching? John 17 provides a snapshot of Jesus' inner focus and concern. Like the protective mother bird his utmost thoughts concerned the care and well-being of his followers. Consequently, we see him praying; Holy Father:

- Keep them safe in the world
- Keep them united (*“that they may be one”*)
- Keep them joyful (“that they may have my joy”)
- Keep them consecrated (“sanctify them in the truth”)
- Keep them mobilized for the mission (“so I have sent them into the world”).

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We sometimes forget how powerful a simple prayer can be. Do we pray for your friends? Jesus did. And you know what? In the same way that Jesus prayed for the apostles, he prays for us. In times of confusion, when we are unsure of what to do next, it is a great comfort to know that Jesus is praying for us.

Jesus prayed for the apostles. And Jesus prays for us. But how did he pray? What did he ask for? **Jesus prayed that God would help his friends remain strong.** That's always an appropriate prayer, the prayer for strength.

A few years back, a lawyer named Ned from Australia visited Kenya, and while there he walked through one of the worst slums in the world, to a hut where three brothers lived. When he entered the hut, he immediately found himself in the center of a dozen or so children leaping into the air with joy at his presence. There was great joy and laughter, in that rundown little hut, and soon Ned joined the children. Then the kids started a sing-along, and they had a wonderful time together.

When it came time for Ned to leave, something happened that he says he will always remember. From the far side of the room he heard a quiet but clear voice. And what Ned heard was something like this: "We pray for the people of Australia, for Ned and his family." The group of children suddenly became very quiet. Then they responded: "Jesus, remember them when You come into Your Kingdom."

Ned couldn't believe it. In the middle of Africa, in the middle of poverty and hunger, a group of slum kids, with reverence and earnestness, were holding up before God the people of Australia. The prayer hit him hard, and he thought to himself, "God, if Australia has any hope at all, it will be because of kids like this."

There is a great power in prayer. Do we pray for our friends? Most of us pray for our families. And certainly, when a friend is going through a crisis we pray. But what a difference it might make in our relationships if on a continuing basis we offered up the names of our friends in prayer.

Jesus is praying for us. He is asking God two things in our behalf. First of all, He is asking that we shall be strong and secondly, he is praying that we will be united. That is one prayer we could help answer ourselves. We could start by praying for our friends. We could also pray for our church. Finally, we could pray for ourselves, that we will truly be strong and that we shall always love one another. Let us be generous with our prayer for others, so that God will be generous with us. God Bless you all.