**17th Sunday HOMILY, 2013**

THEME: HOW DO I PRAY?

READINGS: Genesis 18:20-32/ Col.2: 12-14/ Luke 11:1-13

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

**Introduction:** ‘How do I pray?’ is a frequently asked question. It was a question the disciples asked Jesus. And in answering them, Jesus teaches us all the key guidelines of prayer. In other words, in the ***Lord’s Prayer***, He who knows the mind and heart of God the Father provides us with the best guidelines by which we can gain access to the mind and heart of God. Thus, besides praying the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus expects that when we pray in our own words, the following key points should be included.

‘**Our Father who art in heaven’**: We don’t see the God in heaven. It therefore takes faith to believe that God exists and that He is Father to us. Thus, the ***first principle of prayer is that it must begin with faith***. In prayer we converse not with a remote superpower who is not concerned about us, but with our dearest Father who is closest to us and is concerned about us (more than we can imagine: He is even concerned about every single hair of ours).

Being in heaven does not mean that God is far away from us; rather it means He is at the vantage position to see all our needs, cares, joys and sorrows. Therefore, we should speak with Him as we would speak to a dear father who knows our needs and who is more than willing to provide for us. Indeed, most often God provides us with the fundamental sustenance of life – breath – even when we have not asked for it.

‘**Hallowed be Thy name’**: the ***second principle*** is that in every prayer we should ***acknowledge the supreme holiness or sublime majesty of God***. This is done first by approaching God in prayer with due reverence. Secondly, we should praise Him.

‘**Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’**: Assured of His fatherly love for us, His perfection (holiness) and His divine wisdom, we should approach God as the Father whose will is the best for us. This was the very prayer-attitude of Jesus in the ‘Agony in the Garden’, when He prayed: ‘Father if it is possible let this cup pass me by; nonetheless not my will, but let your will be done.’ Therefore, the ***third principle*** of prayer is that ***the first and best petition (request) is to ask for God’s will to be done*** in our lives.

‘**Give us this day our daily bread’**: To ask God for our daily provisions is an acknowledgement that we depend on Him. So in prayer we may ask God to provide for us. We make our requests with the openness to accept what He gives us according to His will. He who freely gives us the breath of life (even when we have not asked for it) answers our prayers in view of what is best for us.

‘**Forgive us our trespasses’**: Whether standing, kneeling or sitting in prayer, our awareness of the sublime holiness of God should prompt us to confess our sins to Him. Therefore, the ***fifth principle is that prayer should be done with humility – conscious of our unworthiness before the All-holy God.***  Indeed no prayer should be concluded without asking the Lord to forgive us; for we can’t ask Him to ‘give us our daily bread’, if we persist in tampering the (flour) dough with the dirt of our sins.

‘**As we forgive those who trespass against us**: No dear parent is happy when his/her children quarrel among themselves. Similarly God is not happy when we quarrel among ourselves. Whoever we quarrel with also calls Him ‘Father’. So He wants us to demonstrate a token of the forgiveness we wish to obtain from Him by forgiving others before we address Him in prayer. It is for this reason that Jesus says before we offer our gifts at the altar we should ensure that we are reconciled with one another. Therefore, ***the sixth principle is that forgive others before you seek God’s mercy***.

‘**Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’**: St. Paul says: ‘our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12-13). So in our prayers we should seek God’s protection against and His deliverance from the evils we often don’t see, but He sees.

**Conclusion**: God is not Father to only priests and pastors, so let us pray to Him ourselves using the prayer of Jesus and its principles. When we use these principles, and pray in the Holy Spirit and through our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father will surely answer us. Amen!