

Here we are, at the end of the second week of the new year. I was talking to an elderly person who said, *For many years, I made new year resolutions which were all broken by the second week! Then I thought, making a **promise** to myself should work, and again I failed. Then I realised my mistake. I need to **promise God**, and ask Him to help me, **AND IT WORKS!*** He did not tell me what help he asked God, and I did not think it appropriate to ask him, but he was absolutely ecstatic, he had found how to make and keep, what we would call New Year Resolutions.

During our conversation, I realised this person was talking about a relationship with God, using prayer as the language of communication. At the end of our time together he said, *You should try it - promise God you will change something in your life, and then, don't forget to ask Him to help you, because you cannot do it on your own. **BUT** you need to know, deep in your heart, two things: God is a person who knows you, cares for you and loves you more than you will ever understand, and because He loves you, He **WILL** answer your request when you call on Him for help.*

Using this dialogue as a background, this morning I would like to use once again, the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, as a model to develop our own relationship with God.

But first, we need to hear our language, things we (not us, but people in general) say to each other.

Listen now to a conversation between twins in their mother's womb.

... ..

In case you think this behaviour is not Biblical, read the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25.

The dialogue between the twins, could easily be a conversation we might hear between two friends, one with faith in God, and the other a skeptic, a doubter and a pessimist.

The prayer Jesus taught us, the one we call "The Lord's Prayer", is really not the Lord Jesus' prayer. He started by telling us, ***When you pray, do not repeat empty phrases as the Gentiles do; they think they will be heard for the many words they use. Do not be like them, because your Father***

in Heaven knows your need before you ask Him. So then, when you pray, pray like this...¹

The prayer Jesus taught, opens with **two** words: ***Our Father...***

Jesus starts by introducing us to God. The term used by Jewish children to address their father, is the same word Jesus uses to address God. It is an affectionate word, which conveys love and adoration.

In the Aramaic language, ***Our Father*** is one word; to get its sense in English we use two words, but the two words are absolutely essential to help us understand God.

Jesus tells us, ***My Father, incase you have forgotten, is also your Father; He is OUR Father.***

But don't ever take Him for granted as you might your father on earth. ***Our Father lives in Heaven.*** His home is Heaven, so approach Him with reverence. To help you not take ***Our Father*** for granted, declare three things to remind yourself about ***Our Father***:

May Your Name be always kept Holy; May Your Kingdom come soon, and May Your Will be done here on earth, in each of our lives, exactly as it is done in Heaven.

Our Father, who lives in Heaven, is Holy and His Name must not be profaned in any way. Our relationship with God was ruptured as a result of disobedience, so it should be our desire to see this broken relationship restored to the original glory God made it to be, hence we remind ourselves, ***may Your Kingdom come..., may Your Kingdom be established on the earth.***

Then we pray, this earth should reflect Heaven's glory. For God's Kingdom to be restored on earth, God's will, as it is done in Heaven, the same should happen on earth. Earth should mirror, reflect Heaven, not the other way around!

¹ Matthew 6:7-15

This is true worship! To approach God as a child would approach her father, and confess, acknowledge our submission to God and His will, this is worship!

Let's pause here for a moment. Jesus is not teaching us a formula for prayer. He does not tell us, *memorise and recite this prayer, word-for-word, 10/20/30 times a day, and God will be pleased and give you what you want.* Jesus teaches clearly, *God is not interested in ritual; God is interested in intimacy.*

So very often I hear people wanting to *discover the will of God.* What they have not discovered is, *as we get to know God, and grow our relationship and intimacy with God, we will know His will.*

The Scottish theologian, P. T. Forsyth wrote in "The Soul of Prayer", *Love loves to be told what it knows already ... (love) wants to be asked, for what it longs to give²,* which is a perfect definition of perfect love, God's love.

It is with this understanding and in this spirit of humility, that we are invited to petition God. We appeal to God's love for us, to remind us, we are **forever** dependent on God.

- We depend on His love to give us each day, the food we need to live and be healthy.
- We depend on His love to forgive, because we practice God's forgiveness when we forgive those who have sinned against God, by hurting us.
- We depend on God to give us the will power and strength not to give into temptation, and
- We depend on God to rescue and protect us from the one who is evil.

Leave these petitions, requests in the Hands of Him, who can and will respond, and end your conversation, with God in a powerful declaration, ***For Yours is all the power and all the glory, for ever and ever! AMEN***

² Forsyth, P. T. *The Soul of Prayer* p.63

How did the Apostles and Jesus' disciples apply this teaching of prayer as the Church found its way after Pentecost?

The important lesson we learn from the early Church is, God not only answers prayer, ***He answers imperfect prayers***³.

The early Christians were not perfect

They argued over which widows got better food service. They bickered over whom to take or not take, on their missions trips. They fell asleep on church window sills and fell off. They were distracted by theological discussion on circumcision and kosher (clean) foods.

They also struggled with a wavering faith. When Peter was in prison, they committed themselves to an all-night prayer vigil for his release, but when the servant girl answers a knock on the door, and finds Peter standing there, she runs back to tell the praying disciples. How do they respond, "*You've lost your mind!*" (a John McInroe moment - *you've got to be kidding!*). The very thing they were fasting and praying for, Peter's release from prison, God has answered, but they do not have the faith needed to believe, their prayers would make any difference!

Perhaps, like the old man, we need to discover God, who *wants to be asked, for what He longs to give* and like *Love loves to be told what it knows already*, our Father is waiting to be told what He knows already, that we struggle with needs, with health, with relationships, and He longs to be asked, for what He longs to give, even when our prayers are less than perfect!

Listen again, to the twins chatting away in their mother's womb.

... ..

Change three words, BIRTH to DEATH, WOMB to WORLD, and MOTHER to GOD, and it changes the way we view the world, and changes our approach to prayer. **AMEN.**

³ Acts 12

Twins Conversing Inside Their Mother's Womb: (FIRST READING)

Baby 1: Hey, you believe in life after birth?

Baby 2: Absolutely! It's obvious that life after birth exist. We are here to become stronger and to get ready for whatever awaits us next.

Baby 1: This is absurd. There is nothing after birth! What would life look like outside the womb?

Baby 2: Well, there are many stories about the other side. I've heard there is a blaze of light there, an intense and profound feeling of joy with deep emotions, thousands of things to live for... For example, I've heard that we'll eat with our mouth, there.

Baby 1: That's silly. We have an umbilical cord and that is how we eat. Everyone knows that we don't use our mouth to eat! And, on the top of it, no one has ever come back from the other world... Those stories are all coming from naïve people and the stupidity of their minds. Life just ends at birth. Period. That's the way it is and we must accept it.

Baby 2: Alright, then allow me to think differently. That's for sure, I have no idea what life after birth looks like, and I can't prove anything to you. But I like to believe, that in the next world, we'll be able to see our mother and that she will take care of us.

Baby 1: "Mother"? You mean that you believe in 'Mother'? Oh! So where is she?

Baby 2: Everywhere, don't you see it! She is everywhere, all around us. We are part of her and it's thanks to her that we are living right now. Without her, we wouldn't be here.

Baby 1: This is ridiculous! I've never seen any mother so it's obvious that she doesn't exist.

Baby 2: I don't agree, that's your way of seeing things. Because sometimes when everything quiets down a little bit, we can hear her sing. We can feel her hugging our world. I'm pretty sure that our life will start after birth.

Twins Conversing Inside Their Mother's Womb (SECOND READING)

Baby 1: Hey, you believe in life after death?

Baby 2: Absolutely! It's obvious that life after death exist. We are here to become stronger and to get ready for Whatever awaits us next.

Baby 1: This is absurd. There is nothing after death! What would life look like outside the world?

Baby 2: Well, there are many stories about the other side. I've heard there is a blaze of light there, an intense and profound feeling of joy with deep emotions, thousands of things to live for... For example, I've heard that we'll eat with our mouth, there.

Baby 1: That's silly. We have an umbilical cord and that is how we eat. Everyone knows that we don't use our mouth to eat! And, on the top of it, no one has ever come back from the other world... Those stories are all coming from naïve people, and the stupidity of their minds. Life just ends at death. Period. That's the way it is and we must accept it.

Baby 2: Alright, then allow me to think differently. That's for sure, I have no idea what life after death looks like, and I can't prove anything to you. But I like to believe, that in the next world, we'll be able to see our God and that He will take care of us.

Baby 1: "God"? You mean that you believe in 'God'? Oh! So where is He?

Baby 2: Everywhere, don't you see it! He is everywhere, all around us. We are part of Him and it's thanks to Him, we are living right now. Without Him, we wouldn't be here.

Baby 1: This is ridiculous! I've never seen any God so it's obvious that He doesn't exist.

Baby 2: I don't agree, that's your way of seeing things. Because sometimes when everything quiets down a little bit, we can hear Him talk to us. We can feel Him hugging our world. I'm pretty sure that our life will start after death.

(The words changed from the first reading are BIRTH to DEATH, WOMB to WORLD and MOTHER to GOD).