

# SEVENTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



- July 24**    **The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**The Lord Teaches us Prayer**  
A reflection from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable
- MON**        **Feast of St. James, Apostle**  
**25**            **Praying that God's Will be done in Us**  
A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom
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# **The Lord Teaches Us Prayer**

**A reflection from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable**

Our Lord and Savior wants to lead us to the joys of the heavenly Kingdom and so he teaches us to pray. He says first, *“Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”* These words warn us that the irresponsible and idle do not receive but those who knock by upright living and with perseverance do. It is not enough just to say something is needed. We have to seek to find out how we should live so as to obtain what we ask for. Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom but those who do the will of my Heavenly Father.”*

Note too that the examples our Lord gives us are of prayers on behalf of others. We have to pray in charity if we are to be heard. We have to pray by unflagging love of God and neighbor as well as with tears and on our knees. What did Jesus teach us? *“Let us seek the Lord and his strength; let us constantly seek his face!”* We must cleanse ourselves of all defilement of body and of spirit because only the pure of heart can contemplate the truth about the Divine Majesty and understand what it means that *“God is love”*.

So we must listen to the Gospel: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and its justice, and all else will be given you as well”*. This involves giving constant thought to living in God’s love. To ask God for the justice of his kingdom is to ask most of all for faith, hope & love. Scripture tells us: *“The upright live by faith”*; and *“mercy surrounds those who hope in the Lord”*, and *“to love is to fulfill the law for the whole law is summed up in the words ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’.”*

We can do these things only through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord promises that *“the Father will give the good Spirit to those who ask”*. This shows that those who of themselves are evil can become good by receiving the grace that is the Spirit. Whether we ask faith or hope or love, or any other virtue, we can receive them only through the Spirit.

We are to do our best to follow in our Lord’s footsteps. So we ask the Heavenly Father for the grace of the Divine Spirit to lead us along the path of that true faith which works through love. Let us strive to live in a way that will make us not unworthy of so great a gift and Heavenly Father. Let us persevere in the sacramental rebirth that is our baptism and has made us children of God. We will certainly receive from God the eternal blessing prepared as our heritage through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us persevere, then, in prayer through which all good gifts come to us from God. The greatest of these is love. Pray in Jesus’ Name and love.

## **Praying that God's Will Be Done in Us**

**A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom**

The sons of Zebedee, St. James first, prayed that a request be granted them. Though he thought they were praying to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God but actually it was a prayer to be as close to Christ as possible. Did he know what such close-ness involves? Listen to Jesus' reply in the form of a question: Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism which I will receive? They were thinking of honor but Jesus was speaking of struggle and sweat. They thought the time of glory was just around the corner so Jesus tells them that the time for rewards has not yet come but that their future holds danger and opposition and even death. The Lord did not reply to their prayer by asking them "Can you endure death? Can you shed your blood?" He asks simply whether they can share what he is to undergo.

The Lord calls this sharing a "baptism" to indicate there will be a great cleansing. He invites James, and us, to be partners with him in bringing that cleansing about. James & John said: "We can!" They didn't know what they were promising. They expected what they asked for but what does such closeness to Christ cost? Yes, Jesus said, you will share my "baptism", and receive great blessings—the first and greatest of which would be martyrdom! In this you will be my partners, he says. As for the honor, that is for the Father to decide and not for me to grant or withhold. Let it be enough for you that your prayer will be answered, even if in a way you cannot imagine.

Of course, the other apostles understood as little as James or as John had. They feared others would have precedence over them, as though that were of great importance. We too do not know what we ought to pray for, or what we can expect to receive from the Heavenly Father. So St. James serves as warning and example for us in our prayer. What is prayer about? It is about closeness to God and to Jesus, our Lord. What do we pray for? We pray for this closeness as the beginning and ending of all good. In effect, we are always—like James and the other apostles—praying for what we don't understand. St. James, as Scripture tells us, was given the inexpressible excellence of being chosen as first of all the apostles to die for Christ. He received in this way the "first place" he had asked for. Then it was time for rewards! But now it is time for prayer and for keeping our hearts and minds fixed on God with a love that knows no qualifications. That is, we must pray only to be close to God. That is indeed the fulfillment of every prayer

# **The Gifts of God Obtained by Prayer**

A reflection adapted from a discourse by St. John Damascene

Nothing is known about the Virgin Mary's parents. Even their names, Joachim and Anne, are legendary. But scripture tells us that all of us are known by our fruits our lives bear under the guidance of Divine Providence. St. John Damascene put it thus:

“Since the Virgin Mother of God was to be born of Anne, nature did not dare to anticipate the seed of grace. Anne remained barren until grace enabled her to conceive. For from her and by her prayer came Mary from whom was born the “first born of all creatures” and “the one in whom all things hold together”. O blessed Joachim and Anne! All creation is in your debt, for through your prayers the noblest of gifts, a spotless mother”, was prepared for Christ.

Damascene continues: O wondrous couple, she who was free from sin was the fruit of your bodies. Your way of life was most pleasing to God for you sought only to do God's will and formed your beloved daughter to walk in this path. She was spiritually a virgin as truly as she was so physically. She was a spiritual virgin through her love for you when she conceived our savior, when she gave birth to Him and forever remains a virgin.

Let all mothers endowed by God with fruitfulness say: Blessed be God who heard the prayers of those who turned to Him. Let us too offer praise and cry out in the words of Scripture: How blessed is the one from whom you sprang and in whom God is conceived without human seed. We have all become blessings of that because through us Christ is born in others, all have known new hope, and all are giving endless joy. How should we not praise those who receive a revelation of the divine goodness and bring forth so marvelous a fruit? Indeed, the sweetest of all fruits is our sweet Jesus.

Rejoice Joachim, and all you who labor so that Christ may come to the world and to unnumbered souls. Of you was born the one through whom Christ first came into the world, from whom was born the salvation of the whole world. Let all rejoice because Christ is born as savior in so many hearts that were once empty and cold and devoid of joy. You have brought forth one who became the temple of the living God and by doing so offered the Trinity a sacrifice of praise greater than all others. Your name means “preparation for God” and indeed your life was spent in such preparation. In answer to your prayers God has worked this wonder through you. And so you too became a temple of the Living God, as do all who answer God's call in Christ.

O blessed Joachim and Anne, you teach us to pray and you show us how marvelously our God answers our prayers, and beyond anything we were able to imagine. Blessed be all those who walk in your footsteps and in those of the Virgin whom you taught to walk always in the Lord's way.

# **Surrender to God in Prayer**

**A reflection by St. Teresa of Avila**

**“Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said: Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.” The Lord taught us to pray: “Your will be done”. We can easily enough promise to give up our own will but when it comes to the text we find it the most difficult thing in the world, let alone to do it perfectly. But God knows what each of us is able to bear. When he finds a valiant soul God does not hesitate to accomplish his will in that person. I want to warn you and help you understand what God’s will is. You need to realize who you are dealing with when you pray to God, as the saying goes. Think of what the good Jesus is offering on your behalf to the Heavenly Father. Do you know what you are asking when you say, “Your will be done”? You ask that God’s will, and nothing else, be done in you.**

**You needn’t be afraid that God will give you wealth or honor because God’s love for you is not so weak as that. God sets a far greater value on your gift. Would you like to see how he treats those who make this prayer without reserve? Look at his glorious Son and how he made it in the Garden. God’s will in him was accomplished through trials, sufferings, insults, and persecution until his life ended on the cross. You see what God gave to the one he loved best of all.**

**This shows you what God’s will is. These things are his gifts in this world, and God gives them in proportion to his love. Fervent love can suffer a great deal for God’s sake. I myself believe that love is the gauge of the crosses we are able to bear.**

**So if you have such love, think what you are doing when you pray the Lord’s Prayer. Do not let the promises you make to so great a Lord be no more than empty compliments. Brace yourself to suffer whatever God wishes. Any other way of surrendering our will to God is like offering someone a precious stone and then withdrawing it. Such mockery is not for the one who bore so much mockery for us. Let us give God once and for all the precious stone we have offered so many times. Actually, he gave us what we are now giving back.**

**My whole aim in writing this is to encourage you to yield your entire self to your creator, to submit your will to God’s, and to detach yourself from created things. Why does our good Master want us to make this prayer? Because in a very short time we shall find ourselves at our journey’s end. We shall find ourselves drinking at the fountain of living water.**

# **Christ Makes Us One Within**

**A reflection from a letter by St. Paulinus of Nola**

Jesus is our peace. Jesus brings and offers us a peace that calms our inner struggles. The key is that he teaches us how to surrender ourselves to God. St. Paul tells us that Christ came to bring all peoples together in unity and equality. He teaches us that no one attains salvation except through opening oneself to this gift. Of course, that means that no one attains salvation, or wisdom, except through the gift of God. That teaches us the first step to peace within by teaching us to place our confidence in God and rejoicing in God's power working in us rather than in ourselves.

Our first parents sought wisdom and thought it would make their lives even better than they were in paradise. What they thought wisdom was foolishness and instead of bringing good it set them inwardly at war with themselves. It began in pride; in placing trust in self rather than God. When we renounce this and submit to God's guidance we step onto the path to peace with God and within ourselves. What we need to do is make Christ's attitude our own.

Christ gave us the grace of salvation by humbling himself so that we who fell by pride might rise by humility. Humility led him to accept the Heavenly Father's word that to die on the cross would work great good. It put an end to death and so restored to us the immortality our sin had lost; it showed us how to live in this world so as to be prepared for that to come.

St. Paul teaches us the mysterious purpose of the Lord's love which led him to accept crucifixion not only to put an end to the hostility dividing peoples, or putting an end to worldly vanity, but placing all under the lordship of the Heavenly Father. Christ not only truly became flesh but he accepted the "likeness" of our sinful flesh divided against the spirit. There was no sin in him but for our sake he took on our condition, as the Scriptures say, and became one with our sinfulness. By doing this he abolished our slavery under the Law, which could not bring us peace within. That peace comes from surrender to God, even to the point of death on a cross. In giving ourselves to love of him we find ourselves freed from the captivity that comes of seeking life through our own powers. This gave sin its hold over us. Christ condemned sin by taking upon himself the division between flesh and spirit and ending it through love of God. He removed the cause of sin lurking in our fleshly selves. Thus he tore down the wall sin had built between us and God and made us one with God, and so one within ourselves. No longer need the flesh be at war with the spirit because both serve God by faith.

# **The Complementarity of Action & Contemplation**

A reflection by Fr. Louis Merton, OCSO

According to St. Bernard, there are three vocations within the one monastic vocation. There is the vocation of penitent—that of Lazarus, the active vocation—that of Martha, and the contemplative vocation—that of Mary.

Mary, says St. Bernard, has chosen the “best part” and there was no reason for her to envy Martha or leave contemplation unasked to share Martha’s labors. The portion of Mary is by nature preferable to the other two and, in a certain sense, superior to them. Reading between the lines of what St. Bernard says, one feels that this had to be said because it is not unknown that Mary should envy Martha. The portion Mary received is not, in fact, always desired by the majority of people.

St. Bernard himself resolves the tension between the two by saying that, after all, Martha and Mary are sisters and should be able to dwell together in the same household in peace, supplementing one another. But in actual fact, genuine monastic perfection consists above all in the union of all three of the vocations he has mentioned. There must be penitents, active workers (and especially in the care of souls) and contemplatives. But when Bernard speaks of the care of souls he refers to the duty of instructing and guiding monks and not to apostolic work outside the cloister—even though the need for preachers and apostolic workers was acute in the twelfth century.

For St. Bernard, the contemplative life is that which is normal for a monk. It is that which a monk should always desire, always prefer, but the active life necessarily has its claims. Contemplation should always be desired and preferred. Activity should be accepted, though never sought. In the end the perfection of the monastic life is found in the union of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. It is usually found in one person, perhaps in an abbot like Bernard himself.

It must not, of course, be imagined that either St. Gregory or St. Bernard was always concerned with contemplation. Because of the large amount of activity in their lives they gave ardent expression to their longing for the silence of contemplative prayer. Yet they always admit that contemplation is not unknown to them even in their life of apostolic labor. Indeed, one senses that their contemplative experience is somehow deeper and richer precisely because of the mystical graces given to help them preach to others. God always gives us the grace to seek him with all our heart, no matter what other tasks we are given.

# **The Mother of Mercy**

**A reflection by St. Pope John Paul II**

Mary is most commonly pictured carrying the Child in her arms. Jesus is the light of our souls, the light that illuminates the darkness of our human existence and ignorance, whether of intellect or heart. It is an instance of the prophecy that through her the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. In her arms the Divine Light is brought closer to us. She became Mother of our Light at the cost of great sacrifice, of feeling her heart pierced as by a sword.

Mary speaks to us principally as Mother of the Crucified and Risen one. She speaks as one who has obtained mercy in this special way and wishes to share the experience of mercy with us. Yet precisely because of this she wishes us to share in the same joy that Isaiah announced, that of God's salvific gift which comes to us through her personal vocation and becomes part of your call and commitment.

No one else has obtained mercy in the exceptional way that Mary did. And she makes it possible by the sacrifice of her heart for us to share in a special way in the task of revealing God's mercy in our time and place. Her fidelity is a grace-given sharing in God's absolute fidelity to his love for us, for the Covenant he has made with us and willed from all eternity. It is a sharing in the revelation fulfilled once and for all in the mystery of the cross, the encounter of divine and transcendent justice with unmeasurable love. No one has received that into his or her heart as Mary did; no one else has experienced as she did the mystery of the cross. It was her definitive "fiat"—Let it be done to me as you will, Lord!

Mary, then, has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy. She knows the price of it and she knows how great it is. That is why we can call her "Mother of Mercy". It reflects the transformation of her soul and self by God's grace. So our service to one another, and to our world, seeks to show others the Heavenly Father's love and mercy. Contemplating her and her gift of self to God lead us to open ourselves to God and God's love. It leads us to open ourselves with her to the power of the Spirit who causes Christ to be born in human hearts and lives.

All of us are called to the ministry of evangelization and to the service of merciful love. This is the divine gift the Church is to carry to our world. We must proclaim this by becoming for others what Mary has become, by God's grace, for us. As she shows us mercy she shows us God. She does this by showing us her Divine Son. In Christ mercy became incarnate. In us its incarnation is to be service, love and mercy.