

## HOMILY

### The Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary time

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Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski

St. John the Evangelist Parish

Davison, Michigan

Paul Harvey told about a three-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered, she had certain instructions for the little tyke: “Now you’re not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don’t even ask.” She put him in the child’s seat and off they went up and down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. Seeing the chocolate chip cookies he said, “Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you not even to ask. You’re not going to get any at all.” They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items, she had to backtrack and they ended up in the cookie aisle again. “Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?” “I told you that you can’t have any. Now sit down and be quiet.”

Finally, they arrived at the checkout. The little boy sensed that the end was in sight, that this might be his last chance. He stood up on his seat and shouted in his loudest voice, “In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?” Everyone in the checkout lanes laughed and applauded. Do you think the little boy got his cookies? You bet! The other shoppers pooled their resources. The little boy and his mother left with twenty-three boxes of chocolate chip cookies.

This leads us to ask, “How do **you** pray? Why pray at all? Is there a special formula or a sacred language that should be used?” One thing is clear. There are many questions and there is a misunderstanding about how you pray and why.

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, Charley Brown is kneeling beside his bed for prayer. Suddenly he stops and says to Lucy, “I think I’ve made a theological discovery, a real breakthrough. If you hold your hands upside down, you get the opposite of what you pray for.”

How do you pray and why? We are not the first to ask. The Disciples of Jesus came to him and said, “Lord, teach us! Teach us to pray!” And so Jesus, the

Master of Prayer, teaches them The Lord's Prayer. The prayer begins with an acknowledgement of who God is. "*Our Father...hallowed be your name.*" God is not merely a detached observer of world affairs, God is our *Father*—the Aramaic word Jesus uses is the ancient word for *Daddy*. I remember being in the Jewish Section in the old Walled City of Jerusalem and I heard this little child run to greet her father crying "Abba, Abba," "Daddy, Daddy."

The key foundation of prayer is God's love for us. God cares about God's children like a loving parent cares about his or her children. A Roman war hero was returning home. Soldiers were lined along the streets to keep the masses from getting in the way of the parade. A little boy tried to break through. A soldier grabbed him and said, "Don't get in the way of the Emperor." The boy replied, "He may be the Emperor to you, but he is my father." God is our father. That makes all the difference when we pray.

When we approach God, we do so not with Fear but with respect. God is our father, but God is also "hallowed." The word "hallowed" means we treat God's name with holiness. Our Jewish ancestors understood the holiness of God in a way we may not. They resisted making images of God. They resisted even describing God because they knew God was so high above us that no description would be adequate. They considered God's name too holy to be spoken by human lips. If the name needed to be written, the Scribes would take a bath before they wrote it and destroyed the pen afterward. God is our father, but God is also hallowed, holy.

The prayer Jesus teaches his Disciples begins with an acknowledgement of who God is. Then our prayer moves to an acknowledgment of what God wants. "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" The theme of Jesus' ministry was the coming of the Kingdom of God. The reign of God in every heart. This is God's plan for all creation: that God's love, God's compassion, God's holiness will permeate the heart of every person on this planet. We are obviously a long way from that; but that is the goal, that is the plan.

Jesus taught us to pray for God's way every time we pray. Thus, the ultimate purpose of prayer is to bring our mind into alignment with God's mind to the end that we might be instruments of God's will in the world. Only after we acknowledge who God is and what God wants do we make our petitions to God.

Our petitions are twofold. The first is physical. “*Give us each day our daily bread.*” We pray that God will meet our daily physical needs. Not our wants, but our needs. If you are praying for that sixty-inch, flat-screen television, you are probably on the wrong track. If you are praying for a new Hummer, good luck. However, we can legitimately pray for our needs. All our physical needs. This includes our health and this includes our concern for those we love. Quite obviously, God already knows our needs as well as our wants. That’s why we should not spend an inordinate time with this part of our prayer. This is where many people miss the mark in their prayer life. The prayer is all about them, their wants, and their needs. But a satisfying prayer life begins with God and ends with God. We begin with our physical needs, then move to our spiritual needs.

“*Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us.*” We are doing this simply because we don’t want our sin to separate us from God. We pray this because, spiritually, we need forgiveness and we need to give forgiveness.

The Lord’s Prayer is the perfect prayer. This is a prayer for Jesus’ disciples to use. It is a prayer that, if you internalize it and make it the core of your very life, will move heaven and earth.

There is an old *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon in which Calvin is getting undressed for bed. So he says to Hobbes, “Any time when you don’t finish the day with grass stains on your knees, you ought to seriously examine your priorities.” So it is with the followers of Jesus. Any time you don’t finish a day without some time spent on your knees acknowledging who God is and what God wants, making your petitions known, and asking his forgiveness and blessing on your life, you ought to seriously examine your priorities.