
OCTOBER 9, 2019

Wednesday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of Saint Dionysius, Bishop, and Companions, Martyrs

Optional Memorial of Saint John Leonardi

Jon 4:1-11

Ps 86:3-6,9-10

Lk 11:1-4

The Our Father is more than a prayer; it is, as Tertullian said, “the compendium of the whole Gospel,” because in it we find the fundamental principles, the deepest hopes, and the most decisive needs of the disciples of Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke presents, first of all, the gift of calling the God of Jesus Christ “Father.” To consider God a Father is not something absent from the Old Testament (see Dt 32: 6, Mal 2:10, Jer 3:19, 31:9, and Ps 103:13). But to address God, as Jesus does, with the particular tenderness and intimacy of a child who exclaims “Father!” is new. The Lord rightly calls God “Abba,” for he is the Son of the eternal Father. In faith, Jesus, while teaching his disciples how to pray, invites them to turn to God as an eternally merciful and infinitely loving Father. He opens to them his filial communion. In the third Gospel, the Our Father is the point of arrival from the question that a scholar of the law asks Jesus about what one must do to inherit eternal life (see Lk 10:25ff): openness to listening is decisive, as is treating all people, without exception, mercifully. The mission of Jesus in faith and prayer opens us to the fatherhood of God as the foundation of a relationship with one another as siblings.

One of the most profound hopes highlighted by the Our Father is the sanctification of God’s name. It is true that the name of God is holy in itself (see Lv 11:44, 19:2, Ps 33:21). Still, the hope of the sanctification of

the name of God indicates the commitment to live as people who belong to him: “Be careful to observe my commandments.... Do not profane my holy name, that in the midst of the Israelites I may be hallowed” (Lv 22:31-32). According to the Old Testament tradition in which the Our Father is rooted, the best way for the name of God to be sanctified is precisely that those who claim to be God’s people live according to his will.

The second element of hope that the Our Father offers is the coming of the kingdom. Jesus is clear that the kingdom of his Father is present and active in history. He proclaims that God is entering the history of humanity to open a new era, in which no one will feel alone and in which we can build a more just world, a peaceful and fraternal society where the dignity of each person is respected. When we say “your kingdom come,” we express the hope that God’s will is realized among us, as grace and at the same time as the permanent task of human freedom and responsibility.

The first petition in Luke’s version of the Our Father is expressed in these words: “Give us each day our daily bread” (Lk 11:3). This request can have two connotations. On one hand, in light of the danger of forgetting our awe and gratitude, the Our Father reminds us of the need to ask God for food every day. On the other hand, we are not instructed to say “my bread” but “our bread,” probably to emphasize the need to share it in charity with others: true life is the fruit of communion and sharing.

The second petition is for forgiveness. Luke presupposes that to ask forgiveness, it is necessary to recognize honestly that everyone, without exception, makes mistakes and that we are all in need of divine mercy (see Lk 5:8, 6:39-42). Starting from this assumption, the third evangelist introduces an awareness that the efficacy of God’s forgiveness leads us to forgive others in turn (see Mt 6:14-15). God’s forgiveness is always given to us, offered for free. Its effectiveness in each of us depends on our willingness to let it act in our lives, our relationships, and our affections.

And finally the Our Father introduces a third petition: “and do not subject us to the final test” (Lk 11:4, see Jn 17:15). First we recognized

our sinfulness, and now our Father helps us to grow in the awareness of our fragility, our weakness. We do not ask God to avoid temptations, but to help us overcome them.

Prayer is always an experience of relationship with God, an encounter with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Our Father, as a summary of the Gospel, offers us the fundamental criteria for this encounter and the mission that flows from it. The grace to turn to God as Father enables us to live as sisters and brothers. The duty to sanctify the name of God involves us, with his grace, in the construction of his kingdom. The blessing of forgiveness offered us by the God of Jesus Christ makes us aware of the enormous need to initiate and encourage authentic processes of reconciliation, which lead not only to the experience of forgiveness, but also, gradually, to the eradication of sins.

The fatherhood of God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ (see Jn 12:45, 14:9), makes the community of missionary disciples a true family, to whose table of Word and Eucharist everyone is invited. In his movement of being sent from the Father and returning to the Father, Jesus makes his own mission ours. It is the mission of his Church for the salvation of the world (see Jn 8). If all fatherhood has its origins in God (see Eph 3:14-21), in the Church of his Son the Spirit of the Risen Lord regenerates all as sons and daughters of the same Father through baptism. The kingdom of God, accomplished by Jesus in his Passover, finds its beginning and seed here on earth in his pilgrim Church, a universal sacrament of salvation offered by God the Father to all.