

Seventeenth Sunday Per Annum (C)

July 24, 2016. *Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you* (Lk. 11: 9).

The Scripture lessons of the Mass today speak to us of prayer – specifically of intercessory prayer in the first reading and of the prayer which is expressive of all forms of prayer, the *Our Father*, in our Gospel reading. Before Our Lord taught this prayer, *the expression ‘God the Father’ had never been revealed to anyone. When Moses himself asked God who he was, he heard another name [I AM]. The Father’s name has been revealed to us in the Son* (Tertullian, *De orat.* 3: PL 1, 1155). *Father* means *giver of life*. God is the Creator of all that is but only because of Jesus is God our Father. Our Lord radically changed our relationship with God. Through Baptism we become children of God, sons in the Son, and thus Jesus made God our Father. We call this our divine filiation.

This prayer that He taught us *is the most perfect of prayers.... In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired* (St. Thomas Aquinas). It is said that when the great mystic and teacher of prayer St. Teresa of Avila prayed the *Our Father*, she found it almost impossible to get beyond the first two words; so moved was she by this truth. The first word of this prayer, ‘*our*’, expresses one of life’s greatest mysteries, the mystery of solidarity. Each one of us who prays this prayer is instructed to call God not just *my* Father, but *our* Father. Each of us is to pray in the name of the whole Church, for each Christian is a cell in the one Body of Christ, a member of God’s family and a child of the same Father. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that *the Church is this new communion of God and men. .. In praying ‘our’ Father, each of the baptized is praying in this communion* (2790); that is, the communion of saints. Because of this mystery of solidarity in the Body of Christ, it can be said that our prayers *echo*. Our prayers will have effects on those who come after us, on strangers that we have never met, and on poor sinners and the most forgotten souls in Purgatory. Our prayer which today ascends to God will descend like rain at another time and place, wherever God directs it, where there is need for consolation or strength. Just as responsible use of resources will help those in our families and communities who come after us, so too our prayers can be of help to souls far removed from us in space and time.

One hundred years ago three unlettered children were taught to pray by an angel and the prayer that he taught them may help us to deepen our understanding of the value and importance of prayer. In the spring of 1916, a year before Our Lady of Fatima appeared to Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia, they received a visit from an angel who called himself the Angel of Peace. He would prepare them for the mission they would receive from Our Lady to make known the devotion to her Immaculate Heart. As they usually did, they had brought their sheep to pasture and after eating their lunch they prayed the Rosary together. Eager to play, they prayed the Rosary as quickly as possible with their own shortened version of the Rosary; saying on each bead only the first two words of the *Our Father* or *Hail Mary*. After their prayers that day, as they were starting to play a game, a strong wind shook the tree tops. In her memoirs Sr. Lucia would later describe what they saw: *a young man, about fourteen or fifteen years old, whiter than snow, transparent, as crystal when the sun shines through it and of great beauty.... Then the angel spoke. ‘Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me.* The angel then knelt down and bowed until his forehead touched the ground and in this posture of great reverence, he taught them

this beautiful prayer that is usually referred to as the Pardon Prayer: *My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You.* The angel repeated these words three times, and then he rose and said to the children, ‘*Pray thus. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications.*’

This Pardon prayer outlines four fundamental actions we all must do in order to have a relationship with God: *keep faith by believing, worship by adoring, trust by hoping and love by loving* (Fr. Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R., *Fatima for Today*, p. 24). Then the prayer asks God to pardon those who are neglecting these duties towards Him. This prayer was for the children a powerful introduction to intercessory prayer for poor sinners. Praying for the salvation of souls is at the very centre of Our Lady of Fatima’s message. Indeed, the message of Fatima may be summarized as *the conversion of poor sinners and the return of souls to God.* In the apparition on August 19, 1917 Our Lady told the children: *Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.*

Our Lord has told us that *because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold* (Mt. 24:12). Like our own times, when Our Lady was making her appearances at Fatima, many people were abandoning faith in God, and consequently neglecting to adore Him, to hope in Him and to love Him. When we pray the Pardon prayer we are praying for faith, hope and charity to be renewed in the world. I need not tell you how important, how essential this is. Weekly we hear of bloodshed and murder. Innocent men, women and children are victimized by hate. In Germany, there were two terrorist attacks this week, the civil war in Syria continues to rage and the horrors being visited upon these poor people is beyond our imagining. This week I learned of a poor Muslim boy, perhaps ten years old, no more than twelve years of age, accused of being a spy and brutally murdered. He had been to a medical clinic and in the photograph that I saw – I could not bring myself to watch the video, the i v line is still attached to his arm as he pleads for his life. Such evil needs to be repaired spiritually. We who by God’s grace understand the solidarity that exists among all human beings must make reparation and unite our sufferings and sacrifices with Our Lord’s Sacrifice on the Cross to atone for the sins of the world.

At the time of the apparitions at Fatima, Francisco was nine years old. He was a typical boy of his day; he loved animals and loved to play the flute for his little sister. During the apparitions, Francisco grew greatly in his desire to console Our Lord and Our Lady for the many offences caused by our sins. He attained an exceptional love of suffering to make reparation for the sins of others, something which is difficult for most people and even more so for a young boy. I am happy that many of you have taken *the Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood* prayer card and some of you have told me what a help it is to your own spiritual life. I encourage all of you to offer these prayers daily and to deepen your love of Our Lord especially through Eucharistic Adoration. At a very young age, Blessed Francisco came to understand that Jesus Our Saviour did indeed die *for all; that those who live might live no longer for themselves but Him* (2 Cor. 5: 15). To be aware of this truth is a great grace and it is the beginning of a deepening of our self-understanding as Christians. Let us live our lives in the light

of these truths and let us be generous in our prayers and sacrifices for the conversion of poor sinners and the return of souls to God.