

The Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Genesis 18:20-32
<i>Response</i>	Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8
<i>Second Reading</i>	Colossians 2:12-14
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	You have received a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry, Abba, Father.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 11:1-13

The 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year C takes us to a very important section of Luke's gospel, in Luke 11 where Jesus gives a series of teachings on prayer. And we've seen this in other places in Luke's gospel, like with the three parables of lost and found in Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the parable of the Prodigal Son (or the lost son). In this case, we've got a series. You could number them as three teaching on prayer from Jesus, where he gives the Lord's prayer (in its Lucan version), then he gives a parable about persistent prayer, and then he draws on an analogy between how God answers our prayer and how we respond to the request of our own children. So let's read through the gospel, it's a little long, longer than certain other passages in Luke, but we'll walk through it and then we'll break it down and unpack it and tie it with the Old Testament (as always). So in Luke 11:1-13, the gospel for today reads as follows:

He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and

my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"¹

So that's the gospel for today. Alright, a lot to talk about here. The first thing would be easy to skip over, but is really crucial, and it's simply this: that Jesus of Nazareth prayed; that he lived a life of prayer. I think this is important, because especially if you've grown up Christian and you've grown up Catholic and grew up believing in the doctrine of the incarnation, that Jesus isn't just fully human, that he's also fully divine, it can kind of be easy to forget about the fact that in his humanity, Jesus lived a life of prayer, of communion with, of talking to his heavenly Father. And in this case, we have a fascinating window on Jesus' prayer life, because as he was praying in a certain place, when he stopped praying, one of the disciples came and said, "Lord teach us to pray." Now the text doesn't say this but you can infer from the way Luke narrates this that this is a question of imitation. In other words, the disciples see Jesus at prayer and are moved by his own prayer, by the example of his prayer, to desire to know how to pray like he prays. I mean, the disciple here isn't asking him, "Could you teach us a few vocal prayers?"

As 1st Century Jews, the disciples would have learned to pray various memorized prayers, like the Shemah, which the Jews would pray multiple times a day in the 1st Century A.D., quoting the book of Deuteronomy 6:4-6: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, mind and strength." Those kinds of memorized scriptures (to say nothing of the psalms) would have been the kind of vocal prayers with which the disciples would be familiar. They would have already learned those from their parents, right,

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

from their mothers and fathers. In this case though, what Jesus' disciple is really asking in context are, "Lord, teach us to pray like you pray." In other words, it's a response to witnessing the intensity of Jesus' prayer. And maybe you've had that experience yourself, of knowing someone who's a very holy person, who is a very devout person. And when you see them in prayer, its attractive, it moves you to want to pray more deeply and want to pray more like them. Maybe it even helps you to see more clearly some deficiencies in your own prayer or the intensity of your own prayer. And in this case, we see the disciples saying "Lord, teach us to pray."

But there is an addendum here too: "as John taught his disciples." Now what does that mean? Well it gives us another interesting window into St. John. When we tend to think of St. John the Baptist, most of us think of two activities (or three): His baptizing people in the Jordan river, his fiery calls to repentance in the face of judgment, and the fact that he ate bugs. Those are the three things that we associate with St. John the Baptist, he ate the locusts and honey. But here we get another insight into John the Baptist's ministry. John had disciples, so just like Jesus, John had students, and apparently, one of the aspects of John's ministry that was important was that he taught his disciples how to pray. He taught them a specific manner, method, way of praying, like he himself prayed. So John was a man of prayer. So one of these disciples (we don't know which one) knows about the fact that John taught his students how to pray. So, likewise, they are now asking Jesus, "Can you teach us how to pray?" And so this set of teachings (you can divide them up into three), these three teachings that are going to follow are really the answer to how to pray; the question: "How do we pray, Jesus?" So if you have ever (before I read through them) felt like you don't know how to pray like you should, and you've ever wondered how to pray, maybe you bought a book, "How to pray" or "How to live a life of prayer", this gospel's for you. This is Jesus' answer to the question, "How do I pray?" So let's go through each part of it.

The first answer Jesus gives to the request, "teach us to pray", notice, is to give them a vocal prayer, to give them a set prayer. He gives them what we call the Lord's Prayer, or the Our Father (in Latin, the *Pater Noster*). Now in this case though, for Year C what you're going to immediately notice is "Hey, this isn't the same version of the Our Father that I'm used to praying" because there are two versions in the gospels. There's a longer version in Matthew 6:9-13. That's the one that we are all familiar with, it's the one we use in the Liturgy. Our father who art in heaven...so on and so forth. And then there's a shorter version in the Gospel of

Luke 11:2-4, and it's the one we have here. So there is a contrast here. If you look at the version of the Our Father in Matthew's gospel, there are 7 petitions: Let your name be hallowed...let your kingdom come...let your will be done. The first three are focused on God and then the last four are focused on us: Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses, lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil (those are the next four). So it's 7 petitions. But in Luke's case here, in the Lucan version, it's shorter. So what do you have there? You have 2 petitions at the beginning for God's name to be hallowed and for his kingdom to come, and then we have the subsequent petitions: give us our bread for the day, forgive us our sins and lead us not into temptation; these three.

Now, sometimes people will say, "Well hold on a second. Why do we have these different versions of the Lord's prayer?" Some skeptical scholars who are insistent on finding as many contradictions and discrepancies in the gospels as they can will point to this as an example. "Aha! Here's a contradiction in the Gospel of Matthew. The Lord's Prayer has 7 petitions. In the Gospel of Luke it only has five petitions. It's a shorter version. Well, no, that's not a contradiction, it's just a different version. When it comes to vocal prayers (this should be obvious to anyone who knows anything about prayer), you will often have longer versions and shorter versions of the prayer. This is true in ancient Jewish tradition. For example, there's a very famous set of Jewish prayers known as the Eighteen Benedictions. Its typically called the *Amidah*. It means the standing prayer. And in later rabbinic tradition, and to this day, many Jews will pray the *Amidah* when they pray the *Shemah* as well. It's a series of blessings or benedictions which also function as petitions to God. Now if you look at ancient Jewish writings, there are both longer and shorter versions of the *Amidah*. There are like several different versions of this both in Aramaic and in Hebrew, from Palestine, from Babylon; there are different versions of it. So the idea that a memorized prayer can have a shorter and longer version is just part and parcel of ancient Jewish tradition. And this should be clear for Catholics as well. Even to this day, in the mass there are four different Eucharistic prayers. Some of them are longer, some of them are shorter; a priest can do a shorter version of Eucharistic prayer 1 or the longer version. This is pretty standard because sometimes, when you're engaged in vocal prayer, there are practical necessities that make it important or helpful to have a shorter version of the prayer.

Now, why do we end up with a shorter version in Luke and a longer version in Matthew? That, we don't know. But substantially, it's the same prayer. So if you look at it here, it begins with the petition to God the Father, and then there are 2 pe-

titions focused on him: Let your name be hallowed and let your kingdom come. Now pause there for a second. In English, we say “hallowed be your name” (or “hallowed be thy name”), and it makes us sound like we are declaring that his name is holy. But in the Greek it’s not the same force. In Greek, a better translation would be, “let your name be hallowed” or “let your name be sanctified,” “let your name be holy.” Well what does that mean? Isn’t God’s name already holy? Well of course it already is holy, but to say “let your name be hallowed” means let human beings (let humanity) hallow your name, treat it as if it’s holy. Now think about that. What if that prayer were answered? What if all of humanity, what if every human being on earth treated God’s name as if it were holy? How would that change the world?

Second petition, “Let your kingdom come.” Well, that’s very clear. Let the kingdom of God (as he reigns in Heaven) come into this world. Again, what would happen if that petition were answered? What would the world look like if God’s kingdom came in its fullness in our world? So you see these first 2 petitions are powerful petitions. They’re really at the heart of Jesus’ ministry, and they also teach us about what it means to love God. So notice that in the first prayer that Jesus gives to us, he begins with not petitions for things that we need, but prayer and petition for God’s name to be hallowed and for God’s kingdom to come. In other words, for “his will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven”, which is what the Matthean version goes on to say. The second half of the prayer then shifts from God, the focus on God, to the focus on us. And in this case, the first petition is “give us this day our daily bread”, “forgive us our sins” and “lead us not into temptation.” So those are the three parts of the prayer there.

I just would highlight here as I’ve said elsewhere, that in a 1st Century Jewish context, a prayer for daily bread would of course make you think of the bread of necessity, the bread of daily life. We need bread to live, to sustain natural human life. However, the Greek word here for daily, *epiousios*, doesn’t literally mean daily. It literally means supernatural or super-substantial. *Epi* is the word for on, upon or above; *ousios* is the word for nature, or being, or substance. So when Jerome translated this, he gave us the word “supersubstantial” (*epiousios*). And that comes over into the Latin tradition and you’ll eventually see words like transubstantiation used with reference to the Eucharist. And those terms are rooted (in part) in the language of the Lord’s Prayer. So when Jesus says “give us this day our *epiousios* bread” (our supersubstantial bread, our super essential bread, our super natural bread), on one level he could be talking about earthly bread, but its primary mean-

ing in context would be to the supernatural bread of the kingdom of God, which is of course going to be the Eucharist that he will give to the disciples in Luke 22. It is, in other words, the new manna of the new Exodus.

We've been seeing over and over again in Luke's gospel that Jesus is coming to inaugurate a new exodus. We saw it in chapter 9, he's talking about his exodus on the Mountain of Transfiguration. So if his disciples know he's going to inaugurate a new exodus and then he gives them a prayer to pray for supernatural bread given each day, what are their minds going to go to? It would be the imagery of the manna, the supernatural bread from Heaven of the first Exodus.

The next petition is "forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone indebted to us." Again, this might be a little bit of a shift because in the English version of the Our Father that we know from Matthew, we usually say "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". Now I grew up in South Louisiana, when I hear the word "trespass", I think about hunting on someone else's property without their permission. You go in through the woods and you see a sign, "No Trespassing", what does that mean? That means you cannot hunt deer on my property without getting my permission. So "forgive us our trespasses", it doesn't quite connote what the Greek term here is. And so Luke is a little different. He says "forgive us our sins". Now we all know what sin is, some violation of the commandment or the love of God or the love of neighbor, but then he adds here, "As we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us".

Now what's going on there? Why the shift from sins to debt? Well, I could do a whole lecture just on this, but for our purposes here, the imagery is simple. In 1st Century Judaism, in the Old Testament, especially by the time of Jesus, one of the primary metaphors for a sin was the language of debt. So sins would be described either as a weight or burden that you carry around or as a debt that you need to pay off. And if you've ever been in debt, you understand the fact that those are two ways of talking about the same thing. When a person becomes indebted to someone else, it is a kind of a burden, it can drag you down. It can weigh on you. Well that's how sin is, spiritually speaking. It's like a debt, it weighs on us. It becomes a burden, and in order to repair the damage, we have to pay off the debt. So what Jesus is saying here is, teaching his disciples to say "Father, forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone indebted to us." In other words, as we forgive everyone who sinned against us, that's the imagery there. So in this case, I actually like Luke's

prayer here because he not only uses the language of debt but he clarifies that what we're really asking God to do is to forgive us our sins.

And then finally (last, but certainly not the least), the petition "lead us not into temptation" Now this is the one that causes people a lot of questions. It raises a lot of questions in people's minds because when we think of temptation, the English word "temptation" is frequently used to describe being enticed into sin. So if I call something a temptation that means it is something that is going to lead me to commit a sin or entice me to sin. So it seems strange (in the context of a prayer to the Father) to ask my father, please don't entice me to sin. And so there've been lots of debates about this, whether we should change the translation in the English or not. And in this case I think I'll just call your attention to the Catechism. There's a very helpful paragraph in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that clarifies the meaning of this Greek term and the meaning of this expression. There's no reason for anyone to be scandalized by the final petition of the Lord's Prayer, lead us not into temptation). The Catechism explains exactly what it means. This is in paragraph 2846 of the Catechism. And usually I would wait to talk about the Catechism until the end of the video, with the living tradition, but here it's actually making an important exegetical point, an interpretation of the Greek word itself. So this is what it says:

This petition goes to the root of the preceding one, for our sins result from our consenting to temptation; we therefore ask our Father not to "lead" us into temptation. It is difficult to translate the Greek verb used by a single English word: the Greek means both "do not allow us to enter into temptation" and "do not let us yield to temptation."

So that's paragraph 2846, but it goes on, and this is important:

"God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one"...

That's a quote from James 1:13

...on the contrary, he wants to set us free from evil. We ask him not to allow us to take the way that leads to sin. We are engaged in the battle "between flesh and spirit"; this petition implores the Spirit of discernment and strength.

The Holy Spirit makes us *discern* between trials, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man, and temptation, which leads to sin and death.

What does that mean? You might be thinking, “that doesn’t clarify anything.” Well let me make it clear. The Greek word *peirasmos* is the same word for trial and temptation. In other words, there is just one Greek word for both those things. And what the Catechism is highlighting here is that the prayer does not mean that God is enticing us to sin, because as the Bible says in James 1: “God tempts no one”. In other words, God doesn’t entice us to sin. However, God does permit us to go through trials, not so that we can fall into sin, but that so we can grow in strength. It’s just like professors. A professor gives a student a test — you can translate the word *peirasmos* as testing — not for them to fail but for them to succeed. However, it is frequently the case that in the midst of a test, temptations can arise. If you’ve ever cheated on tests you know what I’m talking about. So the Greek word is ambiguous, but that ambiguity actually reveals a certain truth. It is precisely in the midst of trials that we are often tempted to fall away or to commit a sin. So what the prayer is effectively saying (as the Catechism says here) is we are asking, Lord, do not let us yield to temptation, don’t let us fall into temptation; don’t let us succumb to the temptation that often accompanies time of trial. And in this case — I wrote a whole dissertation on this — the Greek word *peirasmos* actually can refer to “the final trial” as well, like “the final time of testing” that will precede the coming of the kingdom of God. Basically, that last petition is a prayer for divine mercy and also for strength. Don’t let me be tested beyond my strength. Don’t let me yield to temptation in the midst of trial. So it’s hard to communicate that into English. The Greek literally says “lead us not into temptation”, but that’s what it would mean in a 1st Century context, given the meaning of the word *peirasmos*. “Lead us not into *peirasmos*, (testing, trial, temptation).” That’s the Lord’s Prayer. Now, we could do a lot more on that. I’d encourage you to read part 4 of the Catechism, which is basically commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, if you want to get more.

The second part of Jesus’ teaching. Now that he has given them a prayer to say, he now teaches them (in the next part) about the manner in which they should pray. And here is one of my favorite parables. it’s the parable of the persistent friend. So in this case, what Jesus describes here is a situation in which there are two friends, one of them is asleep in his bed and the other has someone come to his house at midnight, a visitor, and he has no food in the pantry. So Jesus says, “which of you here has a friend who comes to your house at midnight, knocking on the door asking you for loaves of bread, isn’t going to say, ‘Take a hike. I’m asleep. I’m in bed. I’m not getting up to give you anything.’ But if the friend is persistent, and he doesn’t stop knocking, eventually through aggravation alone, you’re going to get up and you’re just going to give them some loaves of bread, so that he can show

hospitality to his friend. In the same way, I tell you, ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Now in this case, it’s really unfortunate that the English translation (here we go again with the Greek, sorry) doesn’t quite capture it. You’ll notice, Jesus say’s in verse 8, “I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

In this case, the New American Bible translates “importunity” as “persistence”, The New International Version (NIV) says “boldness”. Importunity is kind of an old word, it’s from the King James Version, so it’s kind of an archaic word. We don’t use the word importunity very much, but the Greek word here is very important. It’s the word *anaideia*, which is from the Greek word *aidōs*, which means self-respect or respect. So *anaideia* means no respect. So in this case, what he is saying is, because of his lack of respect, or because of his shamelessness, you will get up and give him some bread. So what is Jesus doing? He’s telling us to pray in a shameless manner. In other words, to not just be persistent, but to be shameless in our prayer. So when you see someone is acting shamelessly, what we’re saying is that they have no respect for custom or for etiquette. And that’s what the guy in the parable is doing. He doesn’t care that it’s midnight. He doesn’t care that the guy is already asleep, his kids are in bed already. He just wants his bread and he’s going to come over there and shamelessly pound on the door until his friend gets up and gives him some bread. That is how Jesus wants his disciples to pray: relentlessly, shamelessly, without regard for custom or etiquette, in a kind of act of desperation, begging God to give us the assistance that we need.

Notice here the timing too, when does this prayer take place? It’s at midnight, it’s in the middle of the night. And we’ll frequently see that that’s when Jesus likes to pray, either early in the morning, before everyone is awake, or in the middle of the night, when everyone’s asleep and distractions are the least. I don’t think that’s a coincidence here. It’s not the main point. The main point is that Jesus is teaching his disciples not just to recite vocal prayers, but that when it comes to petitions, they need to pray with persistence, with desperation, shall we say even with shamelessness, to beg God without any regard for self-respect for the things that are needed, for the things that you need. That’s the kind of prayer that Jesus is exhorting his Apostles to. And I would ask you, in your own life, is that how you pray? Or do you just ask God something once and then if you don’t get it immediately, you just go off disheartened that he hasn’t answered your prayer. Persistence

here, the kind of desperate persistence that Jesus depicts, is something that's radical. This is a radical form of prayer to the Father.

And then finally, he explains why this prayer is efficacious in the final part of his teaching, with his analogy. I love this analogy. "What father among you if his son asks for a fish would give him a serpent?" This is supposed to make you laugh. I mean imagine a kid you know, "Daddy, Can I have some fish for lunch?" "Sure son." And you pull out a rattlesnake and you give it to the kid to eat. It's supposed to be absurd, because no father would do that to his child; or which of you, if your son asked him for an egg, which was a staple for a Mediterranean diet, would give him a scorpion instead? This is absurd, right? You would never give your child something harmful instead of something that would give them nourishment. Well, he says, "If you then (you human beings), who are evil (or who are wicked, some translations have) know how to give good gifts to your children, then how much more would the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" Now, at the risk of getting overly technical here, this move that Jesus makes here is a rabbinic move. They call it *qal-va-homer*. It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. If you've studied Latin, it's called the "*a fortiori* argument". In other words, if this lesser thing is true, then how much more the greater thing? And that's what Jesus is saying here. If you evil parents know that you don't give your son a scorpion when he asks for an egg, then how much more should you trust that your Heavenly Father will give good gifts to his children? Or do you trust the Father to give you what you need, to give you good gifts? Although once again, there's a little twist at the end here. Notice, while the earthly children are asking for earthly goods like food and drink, what should we ask the Heavenly Father for? The prayer here is for the Holy Spirit. So if you ask the Heavenly Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit, he is going to give it to you because he's a good father.

Now, I think that last twist there is significant because let's face it, how many of us in our petitionary prayers are begging God the Father to give us the Holy Spirit? Isn't it much more natural for us to beg God for earthly goods? Like food and drink and clothing and all the kind of needs and anxieties that are so frequent in human life. So Jesus knows that, he knows what necessities people are often worried about and pray for, at the same time he's trying to lead his disciples to try pray for the higher gifts. In this case, for the gift of the Holy Spirit itself. What he is saying is, if you ask the Father to give you the Spirit, he's not going to deny you, any more than an earthly father would deny his child's request for fish or an egg, for food and drink.

Alright, so that's the teachings on prayer. Let's go back to the Old Testament now. In the Old Testament reading for today, we have one of the most famous stories of prayer anywhere in the Bible, and it's the famous account of Abraham's prayer for the city of Sodom to be spared. Now what we've seen in the gospel for today is a focus on petitionary prayers, asking God for stuff. In the Old Testament reading, we have a petitionary prayer, but in this case it's a specific kind of petition, it's the prayer of intercession. So Abraham's asking not on behalf of himself, but on behalf of others. In this case, especially, his nephew Lot and his family and the people of Sodom. So in Genesis 18:20-32, we read these words:

Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomor'rah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the LORD. Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

Now, I just mentioned Jesus' parable about persistence and about shameless prayer. This is exactly what's exemplified by Abraham in this bartering with God, where he's kind of basically talking him down from 50 to 45, from 30 to 20, all the way down to 10. Now, notice here, there are two key aspects of Abraham's prayer that are emphasized in the passage. First, he prays with humility. What does he say? "I'm just dust and ashes. I don't have any right to ask this of you, you're the Lord, I'm just a creature. In fact, I'm just dust and ashes. This should make you think of Genesis, you know, man was made from the dust. However, don't be angry and I'm going to speak. And so he is both humble and persistent at the same time. Those are the virtues of Abraham's prayer: humility and persistence. And I can't help but...every time I read this passage it brings me back to when I went to the Holy Land and I was in the city of Jerusalem, and there are all these markets set up in the city of Jerusalem, and you hear all this bartering going on, all of this bargaining taking place, where you're proposing a price and then they propose a slightly higher price and you take it down. You're haggling basically over the various goods that are for sale in the city. That's what Abraham sounds like he's doing here. It sounds like he's haggling with God.

And on the one hand, that sounds like it might be disrespectful, but that's precisely the kind of prayer Jesus is calling his disciples to. And in this case, Abraham isn't set up as doing something wrong, he really is a model for persistent, humble prayer before the Lord. Now, if you know what happens in Chapter 19, however, you'll know that apparently there weren't even ten righteous people in the city of Sodom, because in the next chapter, God sends his angels into the city and the city of Sodom is in fact destroyed. Nevertheless, Abraham's prayer here still becomes a model for persistent, humble prayers of intercession, the kind of prayer that we pray not for ourselves, but for others. Because you'll understand, what's driving Abraham's reduction of the numbers? It's because he's knows that the only righteous people in Sodom are in fact Lot, and his wife, and his children. And even they, not all of them are going to make it out of the city alive. So this is a prayer of intercession on behalf of Abraham for (basically) his family.

So with that in mind, in closing, the responsorial psalm for today is the psalm of petition. "Oh Lord on the day I called for your help, you answered me." The fact that when we ask God to help us, when we pray to God, he does in fact hear us. Now with that said, I want to close with one last point, and it's this. You might be thinking that as we're going through all this, "Ok, Dr. Pitre, what about unanswered prayers?" Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek, you'll find.

Knock, the door will be opened. Yet I've been asking for X, Y or Z for 1 year, 2 years, 10 years, 30 years and I still haven't had an answer; I still haven't received an answer to my prayer." How do we deal with unanswered prayers? I'll close with a quotation from the *Catechism*, and I would highly encourage you, if you're struggling with that, to read the section in the *Catechism* on unanswered prayers. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2735 and 2736, and the surrounding paragraphs, there's a beautiful section, and this is what I'll close with:

In the first place, we ought to be astonished by this fact: when we praise God or give him thanks for his benefits in general, we are not particularly concerned whether or not our prayer is acceptable to him. On the other hand, we demand to see the results of our petitions. *What is the image of God that motivates our prayer: an instrument to be used? or the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Are we asking God for "what is good for us"?* Our Father knows what we need before we ask him, but he awaits our petition because the dignity of his children lies in their freedom. We must pray, then, with his Spirit of freedom, to be able truly to know what he wants. (CCC 2735-36)

It goes on to say in the same section that often times when God doesn't answer our prayers, what he wants is for us to cling to him even more closely in prayer. The unanswered prayer itself becomes an opportunity for us to draw nearer to him in our sorrows, in our suffering, and in what appears to be his silence, precisely because one of his goals is to use prayer himself to draw us into a deeper relationship. And in this case, it is true that many people, especially in early stages of the spiritual life or at any point, it's easy to think of God as a kind of like divine dispenser of the things that we need or want. We just turn to him whenever we want X, Y or Z. And so the Catechism is challenging us, What is your image of God really, in your prayer? An instrument to be used to get the things that you think you want and need? Or is it a heavenly father who you can trust will give you what you need and knows exactly what's best for you, even when you don't understand it? And as a dad, I can speak to this. There are a lot of things that my children have asked me for that I didn't give them because ultimately it wasn't what they needed. It might be they wanted at the moment, but it's not necessarily what's best for them in the end. The worst parents in the world are the ones who give their children everything that they ask for, because eventually that child is going to end up spoiled (that's what we mean by spoiling). And the same thing's true (or how much more is it the case) with the heavenly Father. He knows everything, he is omniscient. So even

though it might appear that he hasn't heard or answered or responded to the prayer, what the *Catechism* is saying here is, if we really believe that he is not an instrument to be used, but our Father in Heaven who knows what's best for us, then prayer itself can help us cultivate an attitude of trust, the implicit trust that every child has that his or her mother and father will provide for him or her and will give what is best, not just what is wanted, but what is necessary, what is needful.