

ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 11.1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, 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 your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone 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 impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one 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!"

The only prayer taught by Jesus, Our Father, comes to us in three different versions. This is because the evangelist did not intend to transmit Jesus' exact words, but the profound significance.

Of the Our Father we have Matthew's version, the longest, then Luke's shorter version, in chapter 11, which we now comment and in the church's first catechism called Didache, a Greek word meaning "teaching"

But even so these three different versions all contain a mystery that now we will try to deal with. So, let's see this only prayer taught by Jesus and see its importance. Jesus said to his disciples who asked him to teach them to pray: "*When you pray, say: "Father,..."*" God is not addressed using the liturgical ceremonial forms in which God was exalted (like "highest, almighty"). No. Jesus addresses God by calling him Father, because this is the relationship that he has come with his disciples to start: the relationship of a father with a son.

And keep in mind that in that culture the father is the one who transmits life, so he is the source of life. And the first request asked: "... *hallowed be your name.*" The verb "hallowed" has a meaning of consecrate, separate, but when turned to God means to recognize what he is.

So the first request that the community of believers asks the Father "that your name be recognised", that is so the people know you as a father, and in this reading Jesus will say that the Father meets the needs of his children, Father even precedes them because the Father has at heart the life and happiness of his children. So, then the community asks that your name, with whom we have known you, and that we are experiencing - Father – be acknowledged.

Another request: "*Your kingdom come.*" This does not mean asking for something to come, but for the kingdom to expand. The kingdom is already, the kingdom of God. Jesus in proclaiming the Beatitudes, had said "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God's kingdom is not the afterlife, but an alternative society where instead of accumulating for oneself, one shares generously with others and where instead of controlling, one serves.

So, through the fidelity to the beatitudes, the community asks to extend the experience of the kingdom. And here in the middle there is a verse which is difficult to translate, because it contains a Greek word that in the Greek language simply does not exist. It is what we translate with. "*Give us each day our daily bread,*" The evangelist writes – I will try to translate the text literally - "Our bread that ..." and then there is this Greek word that in the Greek language does not exist ... "from us every day."

St. Jerome, the first translator of the gospel, in front of this word that is not in the Greek language, made a choice. In Matthew's gospel he translates it with "super-super-stantialem", a bread that goes beyond its substance. In Luke's gospel it is translated with "daily". Then the church in the liturgical version chose Matthew's version, instead of "super-super-stantialem", difficult to pronounce and understand, they used daily.

It is a choice that caused much damage, because with this choice it seems that one must ask God bread to eat, bread that nourishes mankind. No, it is the task of mankind to procure the bread that nourishes man and share it with those who have none. This is the special bread because it is asked of God. Probably the translation "super-super-stantialem" was the right one. Who is this bread? This bread is the presence of Jesus in the centre of the community, as it is in the centre of Our Father, Jesus as

nourishment, as a word that nourishes life and like bread, the Eucharistic bread that gives strength to live this word. So bread is not required. Jesus had said: *"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* (Matthew 6, 31-33)

Then the clause, "and forgive", literally "to cancel", *"... and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us."* God forgives us, but his pardon only becomes effective and operational in the moment in which it becomes forgiveness for others.

Then the last of the invocations, this also is mistranslated, especially in Matthew, it has caused many problems ... the most well known "lead us not into temptation"! Now the translation has improved. *"Do not abandon us to temptation,"* literally to the test.

What is this test to which the community asks not to be abandoned? It is the test in which it has failed. Jesus on the mount of olives had asked his disciples: *"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation."* The test was that of Jesus who was captured as a criminal, that ended by being assassinated like a criminal, like one accursed by God, a test that had the community in crisis. So, Jesus asks in this prayer to remain strong in the moment of the test, in the moment of this temptation

Then the passage concludes in full trust in the Lord and above all with a very important aspect: the only thing that Jesus guarantees, that is normally given, is one usually not asked in the list of the prayers. The passage actually concludes saying: *"If you then, who are evil,..."* not to say that we are bad, but compared with the goodness of the Father to our attitude toward others, we are bad *"...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit ..."* (In the Greek "Holy Spirit" is without the article, because the Father does not give the fullness of the Holy Spirit, but gives it to the extent by which the person is able to receive it, *".. to those who ask him!"*)

The only thing that Jesus grants is that the Father will give. Holy Spirit. What is this Holy Spirit for? The Spirit is the strength of the love of God that is needed for realizing the design of the Father's love on each of us. Because God does not govern men sending laws that they must observe, but communicating to them his Spirit, the inner energy that makes us understand which path to take in life.