

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Genesis 18:20-32

In those days, the LORD said: "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out."

While Abraham's visitors walked on farther toward Sodom, the LORD remained standing before Abraham.

Then Abraham drew nearer and said:

"Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?

Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it?

Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty

so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike!

Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?"

The LORD replied,

"If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Abraham spoke up again:

"See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes!

What if there are five less than fifty innocent people?

Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?"

He answered, "I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there."

But Abraham persisted, saying "What if only forty are found there?"

He replied, "I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty."

Then Abraham said, "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on.

What if only thirty are found there?"

He replied, "I will forbear doing it if I can find but thirty there."

Still Abraham went on,

"Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?"

The LORD answered, "I will not destroy it, for the sake of the twenty."

But he still persisted:

"Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time.

What if there are at least ten there?"

He replied, "For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8

R.(3a) Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;
I will worship at your holy temple
and give thanks to your name.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

Because of your kindness and your truth;
for you have made great above all things
your name and your promise.

When I called you answered me;
you built up strength within me.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees,
and the proud he knows from afar.

Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me;
against the anger of my enemies you raise your hand.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

Your right hand saves me.

The LORD will complete what he has done for me;
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

Reading 2

Colossians 2:12-14

Brothers and sisters:

You were buried with him in baptism,
in which you were also raised with him
through faith in the power of God,
who raised him from the dead.

And even when you were dead
in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
he brought you to life along with him,
having forgiven us all our transgressions;
obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims,
which was opposed to us,
he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.

Alleluia

Romans 8:15bc

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

You have received a Spirit of adoption,
through which we cry, Abba, Father.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him,

"Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples."

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 in debt to us,

and do not subject us to the final test."

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend

to whom he goes at midnight and says,

'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,

for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey

and I have nothing to offer him,'

and he says in reply from within,

'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked

and my children and I are already in bed.

I cannot get up to give you anything.'

I tell you,

if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves

because of their friendship,

he will get up to give him whatever he needs

because of his persistence.

"And I tell you, ask and you will receive;

seek and you will find;

knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, receives;

and the one who seeks, finds;

and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

What father among you would hand his son a snake

when he asks for a fish?

Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg?

If you then, who are wicked,

know how to give good gifts to your children,

how much more will the Father in heaven

give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Exegesis

Genesis 18:20-32

Our pericope today is a continuous reading from last weekend's selection from *Genesis*. It is important to recall the setting and the circumstances of Abraham's encounter with Yahweh. Yahweh appeared at the door of Abraham's house. Abraham invited the Lord into his home. Abraham instructed Sarah to prepare a meal for the Lord. The Lord, in turn, promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, and that they were to name him Isaac. He promised Abraham that he would be a father to a great nation.

It is not entirely clear whether Abraham recognized the Lord in the three men who came to his door or that he recognized the Lord in the form of one man accompanied by two angels. In the current passage Abraham is walking with Yahweh and with two men/angels.

The scene at the home of Abraham and Sarah we are told is by the terebinth of Mamre. The word that is translated as *terebinth* is *elon* in the original Hebrew. *Elon* means *large tree* sometimes used to describe an oak tree. Mamre was a town just south of Jerusalem, perhaps two or three miles. Now Abraham is walking south with the Lord and the two men toward Sodom and Gomorrah which were believed to be near the southwest end of the Dead Sea. They would have been at some point looking down at the city of Sodom as there was a significant descent in elevation from Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious as cities of sin. Their sin historically has been recognized specifically as the act of sodomy as revealed in Chapter 19 verse 5: "*Where are these men who came to your house tonight? Bring them out to us that we might have intimacies with them.*" (Gen 19: 5). These were the two men who first came to the home of Abraham and Sarah, who were walking with the Lord, earlier referred to as angels.

Later in Sacred Scripture Sodom and Gomorrah are revealed as practicing a multitude of sins. The Prophet Ezekiel condemned them for their lack of social justice. "And look at the guilt of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters were proud, sated with food, complacent in prosperity, and they gave no help to the poor and needy. Rather, they became haughty and committed abominable crimes in My presence." (Ez 16: 49-50). The Prophet Jeremiah acknowledged general sinfulness and wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah. "But among Jerusalem's prophets I saw deeds still more shocking; adultery, living in lies, siding with the wicked, so that no one turns from evil; to Me they are like Sodom, its citizens like Gomorrah." (Jer 23: 14).

Our selected passage, which concludes Chapter 18, is generally titled *Abraham Intercedes for Sodom* or *Abraham Bargains with God*. It seems to me that Abraham is more concerned with discerning the justice and the mercy of God. He seems more inquisitive than bargaining. He is inquiring of God as to where mercy ends, and justice begins. He is seeking to know the righteousness of Yahweh.

The more salient point is the nature of the relationship that Abraham has with Yahweh. Yahweh came to Abraham's home. Abraham opened his door and welcomed the Lord. Now Abraham is walking and conversing with God. In the ancient Near East only the closest servants were privy to the plans of the king/master. The closest servants often became trusted friends with the master such that he would confide in them. This is the relationship that Abraham is experiencing with God.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8

Psalm 138 consists of just 8 verses. It is titled *Hymn of a Grateful Heart – of David*. Although it is an individual song of thanksgiving for deliverance, the psalmist is calling for all to praise God for His steadfast love. “All the kings of the earth will praise you, Lord.” (v 4). Although the psalm is a personal proclamation of gratitude, it is not meant to be a private proclamation.

The focus of the gratitude expressed is for the grace of God’s salvation and His steadfast love as articulated in verse 8. *Your right hands saves me... Your kindness, O Lord, endures forever*. The Hebrew word that is translated as *saves* interestingly is the same word that is the root word of *Joshua/Jesus*. The word that is translated here as *kindness* is the common Hebrew word *hesed*. *Hesed* describes God’s steadfast unchanging love. It is most often translated as steadfast love. In other instances it is translated as kindness, mercy, fidelity, goodness, faithfulness and loyalty. It means all the above. It is this love for which the psalmist is proclaiming gratitude.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth; in the presence of the angels, I will sing your praise; The Hebrew word that is translated as *thanks* in this verse is *yadah*. *Yadah* is a common Hebrew word describing the expression of gratitude. It connotes an outward verbal expression of gratitude such as a vocal song of praise. This interpretation is supported by the expression; *I will sing Your praise*.

I will worship at your holy temple and give thanks to your name. There is a similar call to worship at the temple in *1 Kings*: “May Your eyes watch night and day over this temple, the place where You have dedicated You shall be honored; may You heed the prayer which I Your servant, offer in this place.” (1 Kgs 8: 29). The Hebrew word for *thanks* in this verse is again *yadah*.

Because of your kindness and your truth; for you have made great above all things your name and your promise. The Hebrew word translated in this verse as *kindness* is *hesed*. *Hesed* is translated into Greek in the LXX and in the NT as *agape*. It describes a special love that has God as its source. The Hebrew word for *truth* is *emet*. *Emet* is translated into Greek in the LXX and NT as *alethia*. At its deepest level this word describes a reality that is rooted in the immutability of God. *Hesed* and *emet* unite in describing the ultimate reality of God, who is Love and who is Truth. This reality remains constant in a world in a state of flux and unending change.

Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me; The psalmist acknowledges the turbulence of the world.

Your right hand saves me. The LORD will complete what he has done for me; your kindness, O LORD, endures forever; The Hebrew word for *Lord* here and throughout this psalm is *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word for kindness is again *hesed*. Note that the psalmist acknowledges the enduring nature of the promise of *Yahweh*’s faithfulness and love. *Hesed*, *emet*, *Joshua*, and *yadah* come together here as they do throughout Sacred Scripture and especially the Psalms.

Exegesis (Continued)

Colossians 2:12-14

Modern scholarship debates whether *Colossians* was written by Paul or one of his disciples. That discussion is beyond the scope of this exegesis, and for the sake of this writing I will use Paul as the author.

Colossae is a town in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. It is located a few miles east of Ephesus. It was known for its wool and textile industry. In fact, its name comes from a dark red dye used for wool, *colossinus*. Colossae was a gentile territory made up of Persians and Greeks with a sizable Jewish population of approximately 10,000.

There is no record of Paul ever visiting Colossae. The community there was founded by Epaphras, a native of Colossae. Philemon and the slave Onesimus also were natives of Colossae.

As is often the situation with Paul's letters, the author addresses problems that have arisen in the community. One of the struggles of the early Church that Paul seeks to address is an obvious Persian astrological influence as well as a Hellenistic impact on the theology of the community.

In our pericope today Paul is addressing what he refers to as false teachers as he describes them: "See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seducing philosophy according to human tradition, according to elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ." (Col 2: 8). The elemental powers of the world refer to the Persian astrological influence suggesting that there were celestial beings that were in control of the world and its inhabitants. Paul is reminding them that Christ is the Eternal Logos as he describes in the Christological hymn in Chapter One. (See Col 1: 15-20).

The community at Colossae was primary Gentile. There were also false teachers among them who were Judaizers, imposing circumcision and strict adherence to ritual laws of Judaism. Paul insists that only Christ is necessary. "In Him (Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered to by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ.

Our selected passage today is introduced beginning with verse nine: "For in Him (Christ) lies the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in Him, who is head of every principality and power." (Col 2: 9).

Paul proclaims that Christ must be the foundation of their faith and baptism into Christ their life. Baptism is the participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. In Romans Paul speaks of our future participation in the resurrection of Christ. "We were indeed buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with Him through a death like His, we shall be united with Him in the resurrection." (Rom 6: 4-5). Note that in our passage from *Colossians* the resurrection has already taken place. This is an experience we share in the present moment as well as in eternity for those who remain in Him.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 11:1-13

Throughout Luke-Acts, Luke emphasizes the centrality of prayer both of Jesus and His disciples. In Luke the baptism of Jesus was a prayer event. “When Jesus had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened.” (Lk 3: 21). Luke’s version of the Transfiguration is a prayer event as well. (Also see Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 11:1; 22:41, 44, 45; 23:46).

Luke reported that the disciples of John the Baptist fasted and prayed. “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers.” (Lk 5: 33).

After a brief introduction Luke captures the words of Jesus which make up our entire Gospel passage today.

Jesus begins by inviting us to call God, Father. The Greek word that He uses for *Father* here is *pater*.

Hallowed be Your name. The Greek word translated as *hallowed* is *hagiazō*. It means consecrated or sacred. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the call of Yahweh to reverence His name. “When his children see the work of My hands in his midst, they shall keep My name holy; they shall reverence the Holy One of Jacob and be in awe of the God of Israel.” (Is 29: 23).

Your kingdom come. Jesus sent the twelve out to proclaim the kingdom of God. “He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9: 1). Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God. “He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9: 11). The prayer is that the order of the kingdom of God, an order governed by love and mercy become the governing laws on earth. Note that Luke does not include the petition “Your will be done” as Matthew does.

Give us each day our daily bread. The original Greek *ton arton ton epiousios* is shared by Matthew. *Arton* is the common Greek word for bread. It is most often used to refer to a loaf of wheat bread. The word that is translated in this verse as *daily* is *epiousios*. The translation is difficult as the word does not appear anywhere else in scripture or in Greek literature. Some patristic writers favored the translation *supernatural bread*. Scholars, researching the etymology of the word suggest that *daily, future or necessary* are all plausible translations.

forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, The Greek word that Luke uses for *sins* is *hamartia* which is the common word referring to human offenses against God. The word means *fault, failure, error*, or literally *to miss the mark*. Luke uses the Greek word *ophello* which is translated here as *debt*. *Ophello* describes an obligation such as an amount owed on a loan or it can refer to a non-monetary commitment as well.

and do not subject us to the final test. The Greek word translated as *test* in this verse is *peirasmos* which is the same word that Luke uses in the temptation of Jesus is the desert. It means to put through a trial. The root of the word describes the fire testing of metal.

Most significant in these beautiful words of Jesus is that He is inviting us to call God our father. Secondly, the word *us* recurs frequently inviting us to pray as a familial community, together calling God our Father, uniting us as brothers and sisters of Christ.

The section that follows focuses on persistence in prayer and trusting in a benevolent father.

The final promise of the Holy Spirit is a prevailing theme in Luke-Acts.

Reflection

The Gospel of this weekend is St. Luke's rendition of the beautiful and familiar Lord's Prayer. Most commonly referred to as the *Our Father*. Appropriately, it is the first prayer that most of us learn as children. In the early Church it was most often referred to as the *Disciples' Prayer*. I believe that there are two reasons for this. First, it was the disciples who asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." Perhaps more importantly, the prayer itself presupposes that one praying it from the heart honestly and authentically is already a disciple of Jesus.

Praying from the heart *Thy will be done* (Matthew's rendition) assumes a level of trust as a young child would entrust oneself to a loving parent. Perhaps one of the most significant lines in all of sacred scripture is the fact that Jesus invites us to call God, our Father. In doing so, Jesus is assuring us that we are all God's beloved children. By our baptism we are all made brothers and sisters in Christ.

When I was in the seminary, we had a priest from Syria studying with us. His native language is Aramaic, the spoken language of Palestine at the time of Jesus. While studying this Gospel passage he stood up and recited the Our Father using the words that Jesus would have used as He spoke to His disciples. It was very moving to hear those words. The only word that I recognized was *Abba*, but that was enough. *Abba* is a loving and tender word that a young child would call his or her father or grandfather. We might think of a word like *daddy* or *papa* in our language. The point is that Jesus wants us to come to know God as a loving and caring father, who, like a parent, knows our needs better than we do. Jesus is asking us then to entrust our will to the will of our loving father.

Our first reading this weekend from the Book of Genesis and the continuation of our Gospel both call us to persistence in our prayer. Not only are we to pray with faith but are called to pray without ceasing. It cannot be that God needs to hear more from us. It must be because we need to hear more from God. By persistence in prayer, we continue to align our will with God's will. This enables us to pray *Thy will be done* from the heart and not just with our lips.

There is no right or wrong way to pray. Prayer is about a very personal relationship with God. It is the opening of our hearts and minds to God. The only failure in prayer is not praying at all. Perhaps the most perfect prayer of all is praying the *Our Father* from the heart, surrendering our lives to our loving Abba-Father.

So, we pray, come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

I consider myself blessed to have established a personal relationship with Jesus early in my life. I remember preparing for First Communion and the sisters stressing the importance of talking to Jesus with our hearts. On my First Communion day my grandfather told to be sure to talk to Jesus when returning to my pew after receiving Jesus. That moment started a lifelong relationship that I am forever grateful for.

It is striking to me, as meaningful as this relationship has been, how much I have neglected the relationship, taken it for granted, and even straying from the relationship over the years. Reflecting on this matter continues to cause me consternation, and I still seek forgiveness for it. All I can do is trust in His love and mercy. And that I do.

During my college years and the early years of my career as a CPA was the time when I most distanced myself from the Lord. As I reflect on that time, I cannot remember a conscious turning from God. It was more of a gradual drifting away. I found myself more focused on my life and my career. The preoccupation with the things of this world became all encompassing. I had become a workaholic. I found a great deal of satisfaction in “climbing the corporate ladder,” in achieving goals that I was aspiring to. I found, however, that those “goalposts” kept moving and it became a never-ending cycle. Eventually my life became empty. There was something missing and I did not know what it was. I know now that it was God. It was the personal relationship that I once enjoyed with the Lord that was missing in my life. It was I who had moved.

As my search led me back to the Lord, I immediately heard the call to priesthood. As I was going off to the seminary a Franciscan priest friend gave me some great advice. He said, “Don’t let talking about God get in the way of talking to God. When talking to the Lord, do not forget to stop and listen occasionally, too.” At first, I was not sure what he meant by that.

After about a month in the seminary, I knew exactly what he meant. I found seminary life incredibly busy. Talking about God, some would call it theology, is of course the heart of seminary training. We studied the great theologians and doctors of our rich tradition. We spent countless hours talking about God, trying to articulate the deep unfathomable mysteries of God. Ironically, I found myself again drifting from God. God was becoming something abstract and distant. The wise words of my priest friend echoed in my heart.

I began a routine of spending time at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel every evening. I began to talk to Jesus again and sit and listen. That precious time with the Lord got me through those seminary years. Each night I would take all the things that I had learned that day and move them from my head to my heart. I found myself simply sitting quietly and just listening to the Lord.

Faith is about a personal relationship with Jesus. Our eternal life depends on this personal relationship.

Homilists, your congregation is with you because they are seeking a deeper friendship with Jesus. They want and need a personal relationship with the Lord. They hunger to hear of your relationship with Jesus. Please share that with them often. If you are struggling, do not be afraid to share that with them as well, and ask for their prayers. We are all on the same journey. Encourage them to talk to Jesus and to listen with their hearts.

