



Sixteenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19 Romans 8: 26-27 Matthew 13: 24-43

How should we pray?

St. Paul says that it is difficult to answer that question. This seems an extraordinary statement from someone with a long tradition in liturgical prayer; from someone who grew up with the Book of Psalms.

Paul had learned that Christian prayer was Trinitarian and therefore there was a deep inner connection between the Holy Spirit and ourselves as pray-ers. He named two areas for reflection. How do we pray? and What do we pray for?

In verse 14 he describes Christians, the sons and daughters of God, as those led by the Spirit. The Spirit is our mentor and model. The Spirit enables us to cry "Abba" instead of covering in fear like a stranger uncertain of a welcome.

He then describes the partnership with the Spirit that is a key to prayer. We are to have the same relationship with the Spirit that Jesus had. This union with the Spirit enabled him to be faithful in all the pain and struggles of his life.

One of the gifts of the Spirit is instruction in prayer. The Spirit intercedes for us. We do not need words. God reads the heart. What is described is the loving communion of those who know each other at the heart level. "Deep calls to deep" as the psalmist says. The mystics tried to express this love by using the images of sexual union.

What holds us back from close union with God is a lack of trust in God and in ourselves. Old patterns of thinking emerge to tempt us. The writer of Wisdom touches on this when he speaks of the power of God. Words like power and might cause us to fear as we are more used to *power over* than creative power. In God, the offspring of power is justice. Justice is related to mercy. God teaches us that the just person is a kind person.

We can see why our trust in God wavers, we have lacked, perhaps, examples of this godliness in our dealings with others. There are also many who preach a vengeful God out of their own wounded history. Many allow their own fearfulness to colour their reading of scripture.

Take the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The disciples want to know hoe to deal with sin. Should the focus be on eradication? Jesu tells them that they are not the best judges of what is sinful. If some of us can't always tell wheat from weeds how can we presume to judge the hearts of others. Leave the judgements to God.

Kindness demands that we are not quick to judge a wrongdoer. In this story the focus is often on the weeds that are burned for fuel rather than on the usefulness of the grain.

We need to be aware of the fragile self-esteem of some who need our reassurance when others are harshly critical of them.

If God can read our hearts then all judging is out of our hands. Let us rather turn our energies to the task of learning to pray as adult Christians, as disciples, as those called to be Christ-bearers in the our world.

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