

17th Sunday of the Year C

Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. The heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. (cf. Lk 11:9.13)



First Reading

Genesis 18:20-32

The Lord said, "How great an outcry there is against Sodom and Gomorrah! How grievous is their sin! I propose to go down and see whether or not they have done all that is alleged in the outcry against them that has come up to me, I am determined to know."

The men left there and went to Sodom while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Approaching him he said, "Are you really going to destroy the just man with the sinner? Perhaps there are fifty just men in the town. Will you really overwhelm them, will you not spare the place for the fifty just men in it? Do not think of doing such a thing: to kill the just man with the sinner, treating just and sinner alike! Do not think of it! Will the judge of the whole earth not administer justice?" The Lord replied, "If at Sodom I find fifty just men in the town, I will spare the whole place because of them."

Abraham replied, "I am bold indeed to speak like this to my Lord, I who am dust and ashes. But perhaps the fifty just men lack five: will you destroy the whole city for five?" "No," he replied. "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five just men there." Again Abraham said to him, "Perhaps there will only be forty there." "I will not do it," he replied, "for the sake of the forty." Abraham said, "I trust my Lord will not be angry, but give me leave to speak: perhaps there will only be thirty there." "I will not do it," he replied, "if I find thirty there." He said, "I am bold indeed to speak like this, but perhaps there will only be twenty there." "I will not destroy it," he replied, "for the sake of the twenty." He said, "I trust my Lord will not be angry if I speak once more: perhaps there will only be ten." "I will not destroy it," he replied, "for the sake of the ten."

Second Reading

Colossians 2:12-14

You have been buried with Christ, when you were baptised; and by baptism, too, you have been raised up with him through your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead. You were dead, because you were sinners and had not been circumcised: he has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us all our sins.

He has overridden the Law, and cancelled every record of the debt that we had to pay; he has done away with it by nailing it to the cross.

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "Say this when you pray: 'Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test.'" He also said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, 'My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him'; and the man answers from inside the house, 'Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you.' I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it him for friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants. So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Meditation

"Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples." The apostles address Jesus as a "master of prayer", asking him to reveal his secret to them. We also need to know it, "for we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rm 8:26).

"Ask ... seek ... knock...". These verbs emphasize the insistence of the call to prayer and the assurance of being heard if we persevere. "You will receive, you will find, it shall be opened to you". Above all, do not become discouraged. Prayer requires a long patience, but through perseverance, it obtains an answer. If earthly parents, with all the faults they may have, give to their children only good things, all the more must our heavenly Father give the most precious good to those who ask for it.

In showing us God's response to prayer, Jesus helps us to understand prayer itself. To pray is not to impose our will on God but to ask him to make us open to his will. To pray is not to want to change God but to ask him to change us. For the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come," a very ancient variant substitutes "May your Spirit come upon us and purify us."