

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Genesis 18:20-32

Abraham introduces to us the idea that prayer is the means through which we can better comprehend the mind of God. Abraham is well aware of the evil that is going on in Sodom as he begins his prayer for the Lord's people, including Lot, his nephew, and Lot's family. It appears that Abraham was attempting to change God's mind but in the process, Abraham's mind was changed. He never doubted that God hated sin and that sinners would be punished but he ended up convinced that God is both kind and fair.⁵

20In those days, the Lord said: "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities were in the neighborhood of the Dead Sea. The area was chosen by Lot as his home when he separated from Abraham and it was as fair as the garden of Yahweh.² is so great, and their sin so grave, When the two messengers of Yahweh were received as guests by Lot, the men of Sodom attempted to assault them. From this episode the unnatural vice of sodomy is named.² The sin of the Sodomites is one of the "sins that cry to heaven".⁴ (CCC 1867) The teaching of the Catholic Church is that homosexual orientation, an inclination to be attracted sexually to members of one's own sex, is a morally indifferent condition in itself,⁴ (CCC 2358) whereas engaging in homosexual practices are by their nature, disordered, and under no circumstances can they be approved.⁴ (CCC2357) The practice of homosexuality is condemned in many passages of both the Old and New Testaments and by a number of the Church Fathers, especially Clement, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.⁷

21that 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." God was not ignorant of the perversion that was going on in the city but in his mercy he went down and gave the people one last chance to turn to him.⁵

22While Abraham's visitors. These are identified as angels. (19:1) walked on farther toward Sodom, the Lord remained standing before Abraham. Everything we think, write or say about God must be done through metaphor, through using human characteristics in an attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible.¹

23Then Abraham drew nearer and said: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?"

24Suppose 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? Abraham argues in terms of collective responsibility, as understood in ancient times in Israel: the entire people shared the same fate even though not all of them sinned, for the sin of some affected all. The final outcome of this episode shows that, even though he destroys these cities, God saves the righteous who live in them. God does not punish the just man along with the sinners as Abraham thought, for a person is allowed to perish or to be saved depending on his personal behavior. This way of thinking also shows how the salvation of many can come through the faithfulness of a few, thereby preparing the way to see how the salvation of all mankind is brought about by the obedience of one man alone, Jesus Christ.³

25Far 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?"

26The Lord replied, "If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

27Abraham spoke up again: "See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes!"

28What 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."

29But Abraham persisted, What is important here is not maneuvering God or making Him respond to the whim and pleasure of man. Rather, what is important is man's persistence in his prayer before

God (especially in finding out the Father's will for him, even when all seems to be going in the other direction). The necessity of being persistent in prayer is that the courage and fidelity that WE need comes only by continually calling upon the Lord.⁸ saying "What if only forty are found there?" He replied, "I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty." Since the time of Abraham, intercession — asking on behalf of another — has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy.⁴ (CCC 2635) The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries as we pray for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, for persecutors, and for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel.⁴ (CCC 2636) While Jesus is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, he encourages us to "ask in his name."⁴ (CCC 2634) This is the first recorded intercession in the scripture.

³⁰Then 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."

³¹Still 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."

³²But 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?" In his intercession for the righteous of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham acts as a prophet, for one of the tasks of prophets in Israel was to intercede on behalf of the people.⁶ He replied, "For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it." God must not have found ten good men because Lot and his family were then warned to leave the city and the towns were destroyed by a rain of fire and sulfur from the heavens and the next day smoke rose from the land like smoke from a kiln. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah was deeply imbedded in Israelite tradition; it became a proverbial example of the anger and judgment of Yahweh and the wickedness of Sodom is proverbial as the extreme of depravity.²

Colossians 2:12-14

In today's reading, St. Paul gives us insights into the new life in Christ which we enter through baptism. The Catechism explains that the sacrament of Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church, and made sharers in her mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.⁴ (CCC 1213)

Brothers and sisters:

¹²You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him The candidate immersed in the baptismal bath resembles Christ buried in the tomb, in the sense that at this moment he does not have the Divine Life, just as Christ at that time did not have the life of the body. This submersion symbolized the death and burial of their old way of life. And when he emerges from the baptismal water he resembles Christ leaving the tomb, in the sense that he receives Divine Life as Christ once more took on physical life.¹⁰ through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³And even when you were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, This indicates that most or all of the Colossians are Gentiles.¹¹ The author is saying that while the community was still pagan — spiritually dead and uncircumcised — God brought them to life together with Christ, pardoning all their spiritual debts.⁹ he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions;

¹⁴obliterating the bond against us, The Mosaic Law, to which the scribes and Pharisees added so many precepts as to make it unbearable, had become like a charge sheet against man, because it imposed heavy burdens. The Apostle very graphically says that this charge sheet or "bond" was set aside and nailed on the Cross — making it perfectly clear to all that Christ made more than ample

satisfaction for our crimes.¹² Paul is probably thinking of the Mosaic Law, which as the written expression of God's precepts, pronounces divine curses upon sin (Deut 27:15-26). Jesus mounted the Cross to bear the curses of the Old Covenant so that the blessings of the New could flow forth to the world.¹¹ **with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.** This may refer to the practice of a military commander hanging from a post the spoils he has taken from the enemy. The point is that Christ has freed us from sin and won the victory. God did away with the bill of debts by nailing it to the redemptive cross together with Christ.⁹ Most ancient people understood the desperation of bills, debts, and contracts entered into under pressure of need, including even the sale of oneself into slavery. Themes of new life secured by the cancellation of debt would have resonated strongly.⁶

Luke 11:1-13

This includes the shorter version of the Lord's Prayer found in Mt. 5-7. Basically, this is the summary of the whole Gospel Jesus taught.⁴ (CCC 2761) The first communities prayed the Lord's Prayer three times a day.⁴ (CCC 2767) It is the essential prayer of the church and is used in the Divine Office, the sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist and is included in the Mass.⁴ (CCC 2776)

1Jesus 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." This refers to the special knowledge concerning communication with God that a prophet would be expected to have. The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples authenticates his prophetic mission, for it shows that what he proclaims and performs in his ministry expresses the deepest reality of his own relationship with God.¹⁶

2He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, "Father" is the Christian name for God. Before Jesus Christ the expression God the Father had never been revealed to anyone. When Moses himself asked God who he was, he heard another name. Since the name lay hidden till Jesus, it was new to mankind with the New Testament.¹⁸ Jesus teaches the disciples to do what he himself does for he always begins with the word, "Father." St. Jose Escriva comments that: "Our prayer should have the simplicity of a son speaking to his Father. Talk about Him, about yourself: joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions, daily worries, weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petitions: and Love and reparation. In a word: to get to know him and to get to know yourself: to get acquainted!"¹⁷ **hallowed The holiness of God's name should be revered by all.¹⁵ **be your name,** This model of prayer leads us first to adore God as Our Father and only then to petition him with our spiritual and material needs.⁵ This hallowing of God's name is attained by prayer and good example and by directing all our thoughts, affections and actions towards him.¹⁷ **your kingdom come.** This includes the Kingdom of God in us, which is grace, the Kingdom of God on earth, which is the Church, and the Kingdom of God in heaven, which is eternal bliss.¹⁷ The Kingdom has come to us in the past, in the Incarnation; in the present, in the Eucharist; and it will come to us in fullness in the future, in the unveiling of divine glory at Christ's Second Coming.¹⁸**

3Give us each day our daily bread This is food for the whole person: for the body we pray for the daily necessities and for the soul we ask for the Eucharistic "Bread of Life."¹⁵ Christian doctrine stresses two ideas in this petition: the first is trust in divine Providence, which frees us from excessive desire to accumulate possessions to insure us against the future; the other idea is that we should take a brotherly interest in other people's needs, thereby moderating our selfish tendencies.¹⁷ In the generations after the death of the apostles, we find that the common practice of Christians was to receive the Eucharist

every day. Tertullian attests to this in North Africa, and Saint Hippolytus in Rome. Saint Cyprian of Carthage, in 252, spoke of “those who are in Christ and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation.”¹⁸

4and forgive us The repetition of the word “us” makes this a family prayer for the Church.¹⁵ **our sins** These are human offenses against God.¹⁶ Sin afflicts all of us. Scriptures tell us that even the just man falls seven times a day. This prayer forces us to confront a truth that we’d rather avoid. For it can be as difficult for us to notice our own sins as it is easy for us to see the sins of other.¹⁸ **for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test.**” This petition refers to the final tribulation, the final onslaught of the evil one, the devil, at the end of time.¹³

5And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend One does not go to just any neighbor under these circumstances!¹⁴ **to whom he goes at midnight** People often traveled late to avoid the heat.¹⁹ **and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,**

6for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him’

7and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me, the door has already been locked To remove the large wooden or iron bar is tiresome and noisy.¹⁴ **and my children and I are already in bed.** The entire family slept on a mat in the raised part of a single-roomed peasant house.¹⁴ **I cannot get up to give you anything.’**

8I 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. This parable advocates perseverance in prayer so that God’s children learn to approach him repeatedly with daily concerns. It is not that God needs to be informed of our needs, but that we must realize our total dependence on him for everything.¹⁵ If the man will grant his friend’s request, despite the inconvenience, we should not hesitate to petition God.¹³

9And I tell you, Here Jesus is saying, “Not only the preceding parable, but I personally tell you.”¹⁴ **ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.** These verbs do not have objects, indicating that Jesus is not teaching what to pray for but how to pray.¹⁴

10For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. These prayers will be answered but not necessarily when or with what one asks for, it may be with something better. Prayer is always fruitful!¹⁷

11What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? This image involves a father who gives his son good things. God will even more readily give the Spirit to those who ask¹³

12Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? We can trust that our requests of God will not be answered by malice or trickery.¹⁶

13If 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 The Father’s greatest gift to us is His own Divine Life. Through the Spirit, He sanctifies His children and distributes the graces of salvation won by Christ.¹⁵ **to those who ask him?”** God’s response to us is always for our own good, even if we don’t understand fully the response at the time.⁵

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers: 1995” by Aelred Rosser, (2) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (3) “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch,” (4) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (5) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (6) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2007” by James L. Weaver, (7) “Responding To God: A Textbook in Moral Theology” Prepared by the Dominicans of the Central Province of St. Albert the Great, (8) “A Celebrants Guide to the New Sacramentary” by Kevin W. Irwin, (9) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Colossians” by Ivan Havener, O.S.B., (10) “Saint Joseph Commentary on the Sunday Readings” by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M., (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (12) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles”, (13) “Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (14) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (15) “Ignatius Catholic

Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (16) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (17) “The Navarre Bible: ST. LUKE,” (18) “Understanding ‘Our Father’” by Scott Hahn, and (19) “THE GOSPEL Of LUKE by William Barclay.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.