

PROPER 12 C

Luke 11:1-13

THY WILL BE DONE

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out
that today's gospel passage is about prayer.

So, what is our concept of prayer?

Perhaps we often pray like the child in this story:

A mother was listening to her son say his prayers
one evening before bedtime.

***"Thank you, Lord, for mom and dad,
and please make St. Louis the capital of Missouri."***

The surprised mother interrupted him and asked,

"Why did you pray for St. Louis to be the capital of Missouri?"

"Because that's the answer I put on my test!"

Many years ago on this Sunday,

I was a Deacon and was preparing to go back to the seminary
for my final year of training

which would ultimately lead to my ordination to the priesthood.

Knowing this, the pastor approached me

and asked me about the possibility of preaching on my last Sunday,

and that Sunday happened to be exactly this Sunday,

because the text was the same as today's.

At the time, I remember thinking to myself

that if I couldn't preach on the Lord's Prayer,

then I ought to forget about the priesthood.

But the problem with this text is not the lack of things to talk about,

but rather the many things that one can address.

So, in researching a topic to use,

I looked back at last week's gospel passage,

which immediately precedes this week's.

If you remember, we heard about Mary and Martha,

specifically, how Martha ***"lost her cool"***

when Mary sat at our Lord's feet listening to him

and didn't help her to prepare a meal for him and his disciples.

We have already heard from Luke that this event occurs

while Jesus is making his final journey to Jerusalem,

where he would be put to death by the Jewish leaders.

Knowing that the end is rapidly approaching,

Jesus wants to maximize his time to the utmost

to do what he most needs to do: lead others to the Father.

Have you ever been so engrossed in something you were doing
that you forgot to eat?

In essence, I think that is what was happening here.

At this moment in time,

Jesus wanted to share his teachings with others
as much as possible. Mary was showing her hospitality
by following the agenda of her guest.

She was responding to what Jesus wanted.

On the other hand, Martha was assuming that Jesus
wanted to be fed as soon as possible.

And I'm sure you have experienced the problems that can arise
due to erroneous assumptions.

And that is exactly what is happening here.

By not being attentive to the wishes of her guest,

Martha was, in effect, saying to Jesus,

***"MY agenda, which is to get this meal on the table,
is the agenda that matters.***

Tell my sister to fall in line with MY priorities."

The issue here is obedience.

While Martha was following a preset idea
of what she thought hospitality meant,
Mary was being guided by her observation of
what Jesus actually wanted at the time.

Martha is distracted by the many obligations she is trying to fulfill,
but has neglected the first duty of a hostess:
to find out what would REALLY please her guest.

So, what does this have to do with today's gospel passage?

The Lord's Prayer includes the words

"thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

How many times do we approach prayer with our own agenda?

We are like the little boy in our story.

We want to change things around to suit our needs.

The issue here for us, just as it was for Mary and Martha,
is whether or not we will be responsive to
what the will of God is for us at this moment of time,
and not just to what our will is.

I came across the following story

from ***"Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul"***,

which I believe emphasizes this point.

It was written by a mother about her young daughter who was suffering from a form of leukemia. Let me share it with you.

“During one of what seemed to be endless visits to the doctor,

I asked him for the truth: "Is Kim going to die?"

"I can't answer that question," he said.

"She has a good chance,

if her body starts responding to treatment."

"If! If! That's all I've been hearing for 16 months.

Kim has had these painful shots every two weeks

since she was born.

You can see how she screams and cries.

And all you can tell me is, 'if'?

"Understanding the stress and fear behind my outburst,

the doctor did not take offense.

"Her white blood cell count is the lowest it has ever been,"

he said gently, holding the lab report in his hand.

"The gamma globulin shots have helped her

to survive her bouts of illness,

*but her own body is not producing white blood cells
in large enough quantities. I can't give you a miracle.
Kim will either start producing enough white cells
or she won't." Tired and numb, I returned home.*

*Hearing Kim stir in her crib, I tiptoed in to check on her.
In a deep sleep, she sobbed softly
as she painfully moved her legs.*

The shots would bother her for several days.

Returning to the living room, I huddled on the couch.

I drew my legs up and hid my face in my arms.

I wanted to hide, to be safe.

*But again, at the thought of my baby's torment,
anger and resentment stirred in my heart.*

I began pacing the living room.

Raising my fists to heaven, I shook them in frustration.

Where are you, God? Why are you so cold and silent?

Lord, why are you giving me stone and not the bread

that a loving father would give? Have you deserted me?

Where is your promised peace and comfort?

Silence was my answer. I felt mocked by God.

My eyes fell on the Bible on my coffee table.

A verse from Genesis 22 slipped into my mind,

stunning me with its impact.

I quickly opened my Bible to make sure

that I had remembered it correctly. I had. The verse read,

And God said, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac,

whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah;

and offer him there for a burnt offering

upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.'

I knew then, with absolute certainty,

that God was asking for Kim.

My mind was suddenly clear as never before,

and I realized that I had been placing my love for my little girl

above my love for God. I had been asking for my will.

My will. Not God's. Not his sovereign choice.

A clay pot had been railing at its maker,

not falling in submission at his holy feet.

*Realizing that I'd been trying to manipulate God,
I saw that I'd been doing all the 'right things'
so that he would be required to answer my pleadings.
I had never really considered the possibility
that he might actually ask for Kimmie.
Surely, sweet Jesus, you're not asking this of me?
Not my baby's life. How easy for you to heal her.
Just a touch. Oh, my Lord and my God, not this!
Even as I spoke, though, I knew the answer.
Only total submission to God's sovereign will would do.
In my breaking heart, I built an altar.
Upon this altar I placed my only, beloved child
as truly and sacrificially as Abraham
had ever placed Isaac on the altar of Moriah.
Oh, my Lord, I place my trust in you.
If you are going to take my baby, take her.
I can't fight you any longer.
Forgive me, Lord, for my lack of trust and obedience.
I don't understand why you are asking for my little girl,
but I do love and trust you.*

Help me in the time ahead. A profound peace filled me.

The battle was over. The victory won.

I let go of all the anger and fear

that I'd been living with for so many months.

I would rest in the perfect will of God for my life.

Six weeks later, Kim and I were at Dr. Rubinstein's office again.

Kim had not been ill during all that time.

She sat up bright and alert in my arms, radiant with health.

"I've never seen anything like this," he said

With a puzzled look on his face.

"Kim's white blood cell count is absolutely normal.

This is impossible. It couldn't have changed so quickly."

But it had.

And in my heart I knew why.

As Isaac had been returned to Abraham,

So had my little girl been given back to me.

My Lord was the Great Physician and a Father to be trusted."

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven."

We say these words at every Eucharistic liturgy

and many more times in our own prayers.

And yet how often have we really thought about what we are saying?

To do the Father's will is why Christ came to earth.

To undo the effects of Adam's sin, ***"my will be done"***.

How often have we done what the author of our story did:

raise our fists at God and ask ***"Why?"***

And just as the author of our story discovered,

peace only comes with our acceptance of God's will,

no matter how difficult it is.

We need to trust in the mercy of a loving Father.

And we need to pray with sincere hearts:

"Thy will be done". Amen.