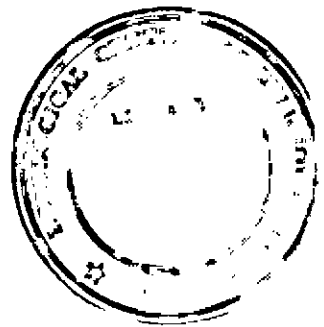


TANGAZA COLLEGE  
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PRAYER FOR THE MODERN  
PERSON IN THE GOSPEL OF  
LUKE



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This is a long paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor  
of Arts degree in Religious Studies.

February 2000  
Nairobi, Kenya

## Student's Declaration

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been  
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# INTRODUCTION

## DEFINITION OF THE “MODERN PERSON” (PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, EXCESSIVE PREOCCUPATION OF THOUGHTS)

There are many Christians in this world who are preoccupied with the worries of this present life. If we look at the lives of some particular persons we will notice that there are many problems with which the people have to cope. In this essay we will call all of the people “busy”, in spite of the diversity of their problems.

At the beginning we can try to define the word “busy” and find out what it means in our present situation.

First of all there are people who are “busy” in the literal sense of this term. People who live in the world, people who have their families and have to provide for them, people who work in the factories or some other places. “Busy” people are those who live a “normal” life full of worries, uncertainties, difficulties, tragic moments, as well as those who can manage to find joy and happiness in such a situation (or lifestyle). They are happy to live with their families, sacrifice themselves for them, provide for them, sacrificing their strength and free time, giving others the best part of themselves. “Busy” people are those who are very often overburdened by their work, business, difficult family situations, sickness, or even the death of someone dear to them. We can also call them “average people”.

There is also another type of “busy” people. This type of busy-ness is characterized by some kind of inner problem. They are usually people who are

emotionally wounded, not necessarily as a result of their own will. These are people who have been hurt by others or even some difficult situation, yet afterwards they remained “uncured”. There are many people who have lost their hope for a better future, who think that God has forgotten and abandon them. They believe that they are not important and that they have to face problems because of something bad that they have done.

Very often we can find another kind of problem, namely workaholism. Some of us are really “too ambitious”. Sometimes people look for peace and self-fulfillment in the wrong place. They think that they will be satisfied when their career goes well, when they get attention and admiration from others. It leads them to a conviction that joy and happiness can be identified with success. They do everything to be the “best” in the modern understanding of this word. They follow all the messages and advice that the mass media can give and yet they are still lacking something in their life. Sooner or later there comes a time of reflection for most of us, and we realize that our identification with our work is not proper any more. We realize that the expression “I am what I do” is really false. People begin seeing that most of the neurotic problems are the result of “overwork,” the lack of time for personal reflection, relaxation, closer relationships with others, family, and finally even a lack of time for God—for prayer.

Most of these problems mentioned here we can identify as a lack of humility. We trust too much in ourselves, our jobs, money, the mass media. We accept everything without any criticism that modern civilization gives us, and usually we are disappointed in the end. Our modern civilization dominated by the mass media, “pictures”, noise, drugs, alcohol, chaos, seems to be very attractive at first sight. Unfortunately people who are not selective, who do not know how to choose the best

parts of it, can easily get lost. Drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, etc. are no longer an escape from the real life; to the feeling of being lost in the world is added the feeling of guilt: "I have done something bad again". People go deeper and deeper losing hope for the future, rejecting the good because they feel guilty and accepting the bad, because they feel they are a part of it. Sometimes this situation leads even to a rejection of the greatest gift of God, which is life. It brings people to committing suicide or to the killing of others.

However, among those "corridors to nowhere", there is someone who wants to help us. There is always someone ready and waiting for "the sheep that went astray". and He says "Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

We need to see that God speaks to us also in the chaos of the modern world. It is very difficult but possible. We need only to be more sensitive, more reflective. We need to keep our eyes open and in the sincerity of the heart look for the truth. "Modern people" are not supposed to forget who they are and what is their beginning and end. We need to see as soon as possible what St. Augustine realized at his conversion, that our hearts are not satisfied until they find rest in God.

# CHAPTER 1

## CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

In our next point let us see what Luke understands by discipleship and what are the constitutive elements of it.

In general, Lukan discipleship has a form of a journey. However, it is not just a physical journey with the Master, but rather following by identification of one's life with Jesus' way of life. The whole journey will be characterized by total dependence on God; trust in God's providence as the condition for the effective result in spreading the Kingdom of God. "In ordinary language a 'disciple' is someone who learns from a teacher. The word comes into English from Latin *discipulus*, pupil. In a secular sense the word was quite common in the ancient cultures in which the Bible was compiled but a religious sense, 'disciple' seems to have been almost a Christian development".<sup>1</sup>

Lukan discipleship is characterized by the diversity of persons who are called to discipleship by Jesus, they come "from all social categories".<sup>2</sup> At this point Luke emphasizes that social status, merits and imperfections do not matter for one to be called to discipleship. What really matters is radically following Jesus "leaving everything behind"(Lk 5:28).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, we find that in this pericope, the awareness and recognition of our own unworthiness to be a disciple of Jesus is in fact pointed out by Peter (5:8). Leaving everything and recognizing one's sinfulness are

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke The Theologian*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Pheme Perkins, *Reading The New Testament*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

two important aspects in our lives. They imply that there should not be any earthly or human security, the only security lies in trusting God (like the woman with two coins [see Lk 21:1-4]): we on our own can achieve nothing.

However, leaving everything and plainly following Christ is not enough in order to “celebrate” fully the life of discipleship. The way of discipleship will be paved with surprises and traps. Richness, wealth, and excessive concerns of daily life can rob us from our enthusiasm for Jesus and lead us astray, for instance, “The Rich Man and Lazarus” (Lk 16:19-31), “The Rich Ruler” (Lk:18:18-30). The followers have to leave everything and not be attached to material things (Lk 14:33). “The fact is that every disciple must be prepared to give up such things, should Jesus so direct. Usually Jesus will require different people to make different sacrifices, depending on who they are and what work he wants them to do but always there will be some sacrifice. Self-denial is the only way to discipleship of Jesus Christ”.<sup>4</sup> Such self-denial is and will be very painful and costly but very necessary in the mission. Jesus does not despise wealth, but quite the opposite, he points to value in them as far as they are in the service of the Kingdom of God. The best example can be found in the passage about the tax collector Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10).

Therefore, besides the concept of “following”, there are two other very important aspects that can help to ensure that the disciple does not go astray: hearing/listening to Jesus, and holding onto His teachings. Discipleship can be fruitful and joyful when all three of these aspects are fulfilled, as is exemplified in the parable of the Sower (Lk 8:11-15). Listening to Jesus and meditating on his word can bring about a transformation in our lives. Hearing Jesus, keeping His words, and being with

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<sup>4</sup> Don Flaming, Bible Knowledge Dictionary, (India: Pilot Books Co., 1990), p. 97.

him as close as Mary does, is the necessary way to salvation: “blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk 11:28, see also 10:38-42). The Lukan Jesus, unlike in the other gospels, does not make the fishermen follow him immediately. Luke offers some psychological background and explanation why they should “leave everything” and follow Him, the teacher and healer (5:11). First of all Luke wants the audience to see Jesus in his ministry after the baptism, genealogy, and temptations by the devil. Then he shows Jesus preaching in the synagogue and healing a possessed person and Simon’s mother-in-law (4:1-44). At last, by recounting the events in Jesus’ ministry, Luke slowly prepares the reader for the call of the disciples.<sup>5</sup>

Another important aspect of discipleship, both for the disciple and the entire community, is prayer and piety, which are the central features of the Christian life. From a life of prayer should stream the notion of hospitality and that of sharing material possessions with the needy.

Above all other models of discipleship, Mary the Mother of God seems to be presented as the model *par excellance* to be imitated, because of her acceptance of the word of God and its application in her life.<sup>6</sup>

Following Jesus does not assure comfort and popularity but just the opposite: misunderstanding, conflict and persecution. The more fully one opens ones life to the will of God, the more easily these challenges can be understood. In the Lukan concept of discipleship two elements are permeating: decision and trust. Despite my unworthiness, social status and race I have been called. I reveal my level of trust, once I recognize my inadequacies and yet still decide to follow. The more one trusts, the more one can realize that the act of trusting itself encourages us to join the ranks of

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<sup>5</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

discipleship. But that is not enough, trust also warns us about the danger of falling into the comfort of wealth and isolation— from not only the poor, but from all people as well. Finally, wealth and isolation can lead us away from the core of discipleship.

All of these points are very important elements for the Lucan Community, and at the same time for *our* Christian life. In our further studies, though, we are going to have a closer look at the concept of prayer in Luke, prayer being the “engine” that moves us and encourages to follow Jesus in his “Journey to Jerusalem”. We will try to find out why it is a necessary element of discipleship and what is Luke’s understanding of it.

### **Luke’s Understanding of Prayer**

Before we go to the gospel of Luke to see his understanding of prayer let us have a look at what Christian prayer means in general.

Prayer means: spending time with God, alone or with others. Putting oneself in His presence in silence or speaking to Him, thanking and praising God, asking for forgiveness and for knowledge of His will; telling Him about one’s needs and the ... needs of others.<sup>7</sup>

When we look at the New Testament we notice that whenever Jesus prayed in public, it was always as trusting Son of the Father whose will is the norm for all human activity.

One of the most important aspects and requirements of all true prayer is faith

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<sup>7</sup> Fleming, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

(Mk 9:23). Because faith is a part of the very nature of prayer, it is impossible for people to use prayer to get their own way. If believers try to pray in such a way they are not really praying at all. They are just trying to “convince” God that *they* are right, not Him (Mt 20:20-23).

We cannot convince God with our long impressive prayers or with exposing our zeal in work for Him (Mk 12:38-40). If believers want to have their prayers answered, they must pray with sincere hearts in the name of Jesus. Their motives must be pure and according to the will of God (Mt 6:10). However, there is no guarantee that God will give immediately everything for which they pray. He may not even give them at all. The reason for this can be that God knows us better than we know ourselves, and He can give us something different instead. It will be, however, always for our good (Mt 7:7-11).

Praying in faith means overcoming all the distractions on our way to God. Faith involves perseverance. Believers are to pray constantly because constant prayer is a sign of their strong faith (Lk 11:5-13).

The gospel of Luke seems to be very attractive to the modern person. Perhaps the reason is that the author was not a Jew but a Gentile, who speaks the kind of language that we speak, and thinks in the same way as we do. The theme of prayer is of particular interest to Luke who deals with it more frequently than all the other evangelists. The chord is struck in the infancy narrative itself, where in the very first episode Zechariah enters the sanctuary to offer incense, while the people stand outside in prayer (1:10); in the sanctuary Zechariah learns that his prayer has been answered (1:13).

The Lukan Jesus is a person of prayer (Lk 5:16; 10:21-22; 22:32, 41-45), and His life and ministry are the causes of prayer in other people (Lk 5:25-26; 7:16;

13:13). Luke portrays Jesus at prayer before every important step of His ministry. He speaks of the prayer of Christ in eight further circumstances. He prayed at His Baptism (3:21); He retired into the desert to pray (5:16), and before choosing His Apostles He spent the whole night in prayer (6:12). He prayed before the confession of Peter (9:18) and later told Peter that He had pray especially for him (22:32). He prayed at transfiguration what moved his disciples to ask Him how to pray (11:1). He prayed also on the Cross for those who were executing him (23:34). We can say that the surrender of his soul to God was also a prayer (23:46).<sup>8</sup>

Jesus in the gospel of Luke also teaches prayer. He explains to His disciples that they must pray for those who persecute them (6:28); He shows the need to ask God to send more disciples (10:2); and to pray for perseverance in the time of trial (21:36). As Fitzmyer writes, "When the Seventy (-two) are sent out, they are not only to preach and heal, but also to 'pray' that the owner of the harvest may send out laborers enough for his harvest."<sup>9</sup>

Prayer is necessary for all people, for the individual Christian, but especially for the Church as the community of believers giving glory to God. "In Acts the nucleus community, awaiting the promise of the Father is portrayed at prayer" (Acts 1:14).<sup>10</sup>

In the first journey section Jesus makes two presentations on prayer. First of all there is a small treatise on prayer in three parts: how to pray, the need for persistence in prayer, and confidence in prayer. The second teaching on prayer comes later in the journey (Lk 18: 1-8). His teaching here is similar to an earlier parable (Lk 11:5-8); there is once more a very similar teaching for the disciples: pray always with

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<sup>8</sup> W. J. Harrington, Explaining The Gospels, (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), 121.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzmyer, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

perseverance and insistence. This teaching of Jesus is followed with the parable on humility in prayer (18:9-14).

Perseverance, constancy, suffering and insistence in prayer are very important aspects in the gospel of Luke. However, we often forget that the third gospel “has furnished the Church with her canticles of praise”<sup>11</sup>: The *Benedictus*, The *Magnificat*, The *Nunc dimittis*, The *Gloria in excelsis*. Looking at these passages we can easily notice that the whole gospel of Luke sheds an atmosphere of joy and peace which are also very important in our spiritual journey. There is nothing surprising therefore that the third gospel is called the gospel of prayer.

Luke was a doctor and maybe that was the reason why the gospel has a very specific form and nature. There is a saying that a clergyman sees men at their best, a lawyer sees men at their worst, and a doctor sees men as they really are. A good doctor can tell what is wrong with a person and will never be disgusted by that person’s illness; he only wants to help and heal that patient. We can say that Luke is that kind of doctor: sees clearly and is compassionate.

At this point we need to mention another very important aspect of the gospel of Luke: Jesus as Prophet. We can look at the notion of Jesus-prophet as being very much connected with His prayer. “It was as a prophet that Jesus was led by the Spirit, as a prophet that he entered the desert or went up to the mountain to pray like Moses or Elias, the great men of prayer of the past.”<sup>12</sup>

The “Gospel of the Holy Spirit” is the next name that we can give to the writings of Luke. In the third gospel the majority of the references to the Holy Spirit are in the first chapters. The Spirit returned to Israel in a new way never experienced

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<sup>11</sup> Harrington, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

before. The prophet Messiah had come.<sup>13</sup> The Holy Spirit filled John the Baptist (the last of the Old Testament prophets). But He descended also on those who appear at the beginning of the gospel and are connected with the coming of Jesus to this world: Mary, Elizabeth, Zachary and Simeon.

We can easily notice that the effect of the Spirit is always the same: prayer and thanksgiving to God. These elements (prayer and thanksgiving) we can see in the canticles which we have just aforementioned. All of these people were filled with the Holy Spirit, but it was Jesus Himself who was the main recipient. The power of the Holy Spirit was with Him since the time of His conception (1:35), and indeed throughout His life.

At the beginning of His public life, after His baptism in Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit He was led by the Spirit to the wilderness where he was “tempted by the devil” (4:1-2). Here the Spirit is not leading him for his own sake but because he is Messiah. His temptation is messianic. His forty days are in fact the renewal of Israel’s forty years; both were led by the Spirit, but where Israel had failed, Jesus triumphed. He therefore could enter into the kingdom of His messianic ministry.<sup>14</sup>

He came back to Galilee with the power of the Spirit upon him, and entering the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day, He read the prophecy from the book of Isaiah (Lk 4:16-22; Is 61:1-2):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me, and sent me out to preach the gospel to the poor...to proclaim a year when men may find acceptance with the Lord.

In this passage we can see the “style” of the ministry of Jesus. That style is an indication, a sign, of what His ministry is going to be like as the drama unfolds.

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<sup>13</sup> Adrian Hastings, Prophet and Witness in Jerusalem, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, inc., 1958), p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Guillet., Themes of The Bible, (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers Association, 1960), pp. 9-25

In the third gospel we find a great number of references to the Holy Spirit, and many of them are linked with the prayer of Jesus. First of all there is the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan (3:21-22). In chapter 10 we find one of the Lord's prayers when Jesus "filled with gladness by the Holy Spirit" praises God (vss. 21-22).

Thus some of the characteristics of Luke's gospel are: gladness, prayer, the Holy Spirit. In prayer Jesus is closest to the Holy Spirit and at the same time to the Father. There are moments when He leaves His disciples and goes to desolate places to pray, and that prayer is mostly a prayer of union with the Father, not just a prayer of petition. That is the "mutual exchange of love that He does not find with men."<sup>15</sup>

He lives with people, teaches them, heals them, but He is alone in spite of that. He can find consolation, encouragement, and strength only in prayer.

The prayer of Jesus is also a part of His messianic call. Jesus as the prophet and messiah communicates with the Holy Spirit at prayer.<sup>16</sup>

Very important for us to see is how Jesus prays, why Jesus prays, but also that He prays here for us to see. The public ministry of Jesus begins with prayer and finishes with a prayer on the Cross. It is only in the gospel of Luke that the most important events take place always after prayer (e.g., in 6:12. only Luke tells us that the choosing of the Twelve followed a night of prayer on the mountain side. Always when we see Jesus praying there is a sort of mystery: there may be joy, glory or agony.

The presence of the Spirit is one of the characteristics not only of the Messiah but also of the new messianic community - the Christian Church.<sup>17</sup> The Spirit is present among the faithful according to the promise of Jesus (12:11-12) after He

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<sup>15</sup> Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

departed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8). There is a parallelism between the two books of Luke: as the Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism at the river Jordan, so now He descends upon the disciples of Jesus in the upper room. What is important here is that each of these two comings of the Spirit inaugurates ministry. When we read the Acts of the Apostles as a continuation of the gospel of Luke we notice that the first Christian Community was a community of prayer. They prayed constantly according to the command of Jesus, and they prayed at the decisive moments of the life of the early Community, exactly as Jesus did (4:23-31). As Adrian Hastings relates, "In all of this one notes Luke's concern to join to the disciples' ministering activity the need for ongoing communion with God himself. That has to be the source of vitality in the activity of the disciples".<sup>18</sup>

In this initial presentation we have seen what prayer means for Luke and his community in the book of Luke/Acts, and how important it is for the followers of Jesus. In our first chapter we will have a closer look at some particular passages of the third gospel, trying to see what message Luke wants to pass to us and what importance it has in our life.

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<sup>18</sup> Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

## CHAPTER 2

### TEACHING ON PRAYER IN PARABLES

The teaching on prayer in the gospel of Luke we can divide into two parts: the teaching of Jesus in parables and the narratives recorded by Luke.

Already in the Old Testament we notice that “the biblical God speaks through images that touch hidden depths of human experience and cover the whole gamut of human emotion.”<sup>19</sup> Biblical literature is not ashamed also of its wealth of images, not always reconciled with each other. Jesus of Nazareth is both heir to this tradition and the genesis of a new tradition.<sup>20</sup>

Among the sayings in the gospel of Luke, those which best embody the speech of Jesus and which are not distinctive of him are parables attributed to him. “These parables manifest such a range of images that the everyday world of rural, first-century Palestine comes alive in a way true of few ancient cultures. The parables embrace images of the dynamism of nature and deviousness of human nature and range from short narrative vignettes to full-blown dramatic stories.”<sup>21</sup>

We can say that through the language of Jesus we can become familiar with his imagination as it brings to expression his self-understanding of his mission and his struggle with the mystery of his Father’s will. As Robert Tannehil says, “The sayings do not invite contemplation of themselves as objects of value but requires to

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<sup>19</sup> John R. Donahue., The Gospel in Parable, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

contemplate our lives.”<sup>22</sup>

Among the Synoptic Gospels, Luke contains the most extensive collection of parables, including those which have become classic representatives of Jesus’ teaching: The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son, and The Pharisee and Tax Collector.

In the Luke’s parables the mystery of human interaction seems to be emphasized more than the threat of judgment or the mystery of nature that we can notice in the other gospels. “For Luke, the human condition is a stage on which appear memorable characters: the churlish older brother (15:25-32), the crafty steward (16:1-8). Luke invites us into this world by the frequent use of soliloquy (e.g., 12:19; 15:17; 16:3; 18:4-5) where we are made privy to the inner musings of the characters. Luke eschews allegory and expresses realistic sympathy for the dilemmas of ordinary human existence.”<sup>23</sup>

Our main point of interest here is the parables that talk about prayer. We will have a look at only two parables which seem to be very convincing and encouraging for those who feel neglected by others because nobody helps them in their spiritual journey, or neglected because of their difficult situation, and finally for those who feel neglected by God because of some kind of psychological problems and reliance on themselves only.

The first parable we will talk about is “The importunate friend and effective prayer” where we will see the necessity of perseverance and insistence in our spiritual life. The other one is the parable of “the Pharisee and Tax-Collector” where there is emphasized the need for humility and patience.

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<sup>22</sup> Tannehill, The Sword of His Mouth, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> Donahue, op. cit., p. 126.

## **“The Friend at Midnight” (Luke 11:5-8)**

At the first sight, the parable seems to be very simple. An uninvited and unexpected visitor comes in the middle of the night and according to Jewish hospitality custom, his friend should receive him into his house and offer him a meal. He goes to “his friend” who is fast asleep with his family in the one-room house and asks for three loaves of bread. “The latter is obviously perturbed (11:7, ‘Do not bother me,’ the same Greek phrase found in Luke 18:5), initially refuses, since he does not want to rouse his sleeping family”.<sup>24</sup> The narrative here does not show that the request was granted but shifts to an application that the sleeping friend will answer the request because of “his importunity” and not because of friendship.

Although the parable seems to be simple and easy to understand it is awkward and difficult for several reasons. “It is one long question with many clauses joined with conjunctions in Semitic fashion”.<sup>25</sup>

The opening “Which of you?” asks the reader to identify with that person going at midnight to ask his friend for bread, but Luke puts more emphasis on the sleeping friend. The question which we find at the beginning of the parable “Which one of you?” has its answer at the end of this parable. The answer is, “No one”.

The message here is about prayer. But the purpose of the parable is not the comparison of God to the sleeping friend who responds only because the other person bothers him. The point is that if our friends answer importunate appeals, how much more will God who desires to give us the kingdom (12:32).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>25</sup> Fred, B. Craddock., Luke, Interpretation: a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1990), p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

The final verse (11:8), which is translated in RVS as “because of his importunity” (*anaideia*), could also be translated “because of his shameless persistence” (i.e., of the person knocking) or “because of his ‘loss of face’ (i.e., the man in bed does not want to shame himself because he ignored the request of his friend). According to Jeremias the main emphasis is put on the friend who gets up at midnight. He asks a rhetorical question and gives at the same time his main evidence for his suggestion. His question introduces and dominates the parable (vv. 5-7). He translates it as follows: “Can you imagine that, if one of you had a friend who came to you at midnight and said to you, ‘My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend has come to me on a journey and I have nothing to set before him,’ would you call out, ‘Don’t disturb me?’ ‘Can you imagine such a thing?’”<sup>27</sup>

The answer is obvious-“I cannot imagine such a situation.” So, the parable suggests an argument “from the lesser to the greater”. It shows how much more we can expect from God than from a human being even though he might be our friend. It shows the difference between God and people rather than similarity between their attitudes.<sup>28</sup>

This parable could have been told to encourage us to pray, to develop our habit of prayer. But we cannot say that Luke wrote it in order to convince us that importunity in prayer is necessary, that we need to “force” God to listen and answer our petitions. That kind of prayer might be good in some situations, but the story could be told also to discourage that form of persistent prayer.

We need to remember that God is not like “the sleeping friend” and we do not have to approach him that way. In the gospel of Matthew we read: “...your Father

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<sup>27</sup> Donahue, *op. cit.*, 186.

<sup>28</sup> Bailey Kenneth, *Poet and Peasant*, (England: Grant Rapids, 1984), p. 119-33.

knows what you need before you ask him” (Matt 6:7-8) so most probably the reason for the parable could be the explanation to the people that they should not “ask importunately” but “ask trustfully”.<sup>29</sup>

Very often we speak a lot of words when we pray and we repeat them over and over again. Sometimes people feel that the words are empty and “do not reach” God, that our prayer is useless. In that case we must remember that the words we speak are not just for God, they help those who speak them out as well. We do not need to convince God about our rights or needs but instead we need to overcome our pride, indifference and selfishness. Sometimes it is not really important what we say; there are so many difficult life situations that make us feel bitter, depressed or even furious at God, that it seems as if he does not care about us. So our prayer is mostly our own struggle, or probably the struggle of God with us who tries to tell us something through our experience.

In the life of Jesus there are also some examples of such a prayer. As we said in the introduction Jesus very often moves away from people and prays all night in silence and separation. The most clear example is Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane before his passion. Jesus is not just passively accepting the will of the Father but asking him to change his plan if it is possible. And instead of receiving what he asks for he is strengthened and encouraged, ready to face his trial.

Here the words of Montefiore seem to be very helpful, he writes: “In the full magnificence and simplicity of his faith, Jesus declares that every prayer will be answered. The case of a man asking for follies or absurdities or evils is not considered or thought of”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> George Buttrick (Ed.), *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 203.

<sup>30</sup> Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels II*, 119. As found in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 202.

God is not like “the sleeping friend” at night when we ask for what we need whether it is food, love, justice or relief from pain. God is the loving Father and we can trust in his goodness and do not need to “bother” him in order to make him hear our requests.

Going further, we read that “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

Luke substitutes here the Matthew’s “good things” with the Holy Spirit. Looking at this short passage we see once more the importance of prayer in the Holy Spirit in the gospel of Luke/Acts. Although he does not give us sometimes what we ask for he is always ready to give us his best gift—the gift of himself, the Holy Spirit. This is the only gift that he cannot give to us unless we ask him for it. “A father can give his children the *things* they need, even though they never ask or even know; but he cannot give himself, i.e., his love, except to those who are ready and eager to receive it.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Buttrick, op. cit., p. 205.

## “The Pharisee and Tax-Collector” (Lk 18: 9 – 14)

The next point of our reflection is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. This is a parable for those “who trusted in themselves [instead of in God] that they were righteous and despised others.”

According to Joachim Jeremias the parable belong to an early Palestinian tradition. “*Two men*”: both of them live in Jerusalem. “*Up into the Temple*”: the Temple is on high ground, with valleys to the south, east, and west. “*To pray*”: most probably they go to the Temple at the hour of prayer, ie. at 3 p.m.<sup>32</sup> V.10. “*The story has its setting in Jerusalem. The Temple was used for private prayer and meditation as well as for public prayer at stated occasions (1:10; Acts 3:1).*”<sup>33</sup> V. 11 says: “with himself”, prayer was not usually silent, but spoken under one’s breath (cf. Acts 8: 30). So the meaning of this could be that he took a prominent position at prayer. In vv. 11 and 12 the Pharisee is recounting the sins that he did not commit and the good deeds he was able to perform.

Let us have a look at the life style of those two people. First of all the evangelist mentions the Pharisee as a representative of the Jewish faith, the Law. The Pharisees are often caricatured in the Gospels, but in fact, they were regularly esteemed by people. “They were highly regarded not only for their studiousness and dedication but for their humility and charity”.<sup>34</sup> They lived a sacrificial life and used to take care for the poor. It is important to mention that it was the Pharisees that kept the Jewish faith and all the traditions alive during the Roman occupation.

If we look at this particular event, of course, we will notice some faults of this

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<sup>32</sup> Joachim Jeremias, Rediscovering The Parables, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966), p. 111.

<sup>33</sup> Buttrick, op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>34</sup> F. H. Borsch, Many Things in Parables, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 26.

Pharisee. His prayer sounds a bit long-winded. He seems to be self centered and concentrated on the negative virtues, i.e. fasting had a great significance in Judaism because it led to compassion and care for others (cf. Isa 58: 6-12).<sup>35</sup> From the point of view of Jewish people, he was a very religious and ethical person. This Pharisee seems to be honest and prays to God giving him thanks for his situation. This biblical prayer is very similar to that of another Pharisee, which has come down to us from the first century AD. In the Talmud we read: *"I thank thee, O Lord, my God, that thou hast given me my lot with those who sit in the house of learning and not with those who sit at the street- corners; for I am early to work on the words of the Torah, and they are early to work on things of no moment. I weary myself, and they weary themselves; I weary myself and profit thereby, and they weary themselves to no profit. I run, and they run; I run towards the life of the age to come, and they run towards the pit of destruction."*<sup>36</sup>

In that case, if the Pharisee is just reciting the words of Talmud, what is the trouble with his prayer? To those who heard the parable first it must have been shocking and incomprehensible. The prayer of the Pharisee is true. He really give thanks to God for his guidance and protection from doing evil. We notice also here that his prayer does not contain any petition, only thanks. So, what is wrong with that prayer?

The fault of the Pharisee's prayer is that he wants to define his goodness over against the tax-collector. According to Bailey the most probable translation of the Greek text (*statheis pros heauton*) suggests that he "stood apart" to offer his  
" thanksgiving."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth, E, Bailey., *Through Peasant Eyes*, (England: Grant Rapids, 1983), p. 154.

Frederick Borsh suggests that on this day the Pharisee forgot the words attributed to Rabbi Hillel: *"Keep not aloof from the congregation and trust not in thyself until the day of thy death, and judge not thy fellow until thou art come into his place."*<sup>38</sup> For this Pharisee there would be no community even at prayer. The Pharisee seems to be very proud of himself and hence he is separating himself from the tax-collector. He is not only separating himself from the tax-collector, but he is separating at the same time those who do wrong from the Jewish community and God's care. *"He opens up a devilish gulf between himself and the tax-collector, when he seizes the good for himself and pushes the other man into evil."*<sup>39</sup> We notice here this kind of oppression which is very common in today's world. This is a call for justice which does not omit even the sphere of spiritual life, where one person wants to appear better than the other one. Here we can mention the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew which fits very well with this parable: "The tax-collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you" (Matt 21:31).

For the Pharisee the key word of his prayer was "I". He thanked God but actually he thought only about himself. He cited the prayer from Talmud, and recalled that in tithing and fasting he had done even more than it was prescribed in the Law. He was a patriot and a good person and a good religious. That in fact was the burden for his "prayer".<sup>40</sup> He preened himself by condemning others.

What the Pharisee does here is very human; however, the bad news of the parable is that those who listened to it are good people. "The shock of the parable is that it is goodness defined in this good man's way that, by setting the tax-collectors outside the Kingdom, in fact makes the good man the outsider to the true community

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<sup>38</sup> Borsh, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> J. Moltmann., *The Power of the Powerless*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 96.

<sup>40</sup> Buttrick, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

of Israel”.<sup>41</sup>

What about the other man in this parable: the Tax-Collector?

We need to look at him also from the standpoint of his time. We read that he stood far off, kept his eyes lowered, beat his breast (as a sign of repentance, cf. Luke 23:48) and cries out for mercy. Luke makes the tax-agent different from the Pharisee. He declares himself to be exactly what the Pharisee considered him a sinner. Furthermore, rather than speak to God with reference to the Pharisee (with peripheral vision), he straightforwardly begs for mercy.<sup>42</sup> “He did not even lift up his eyes to heaven” (v. 13), not mentioning even his hands. (It is important to say that lifted hands was the usual gesture in prayer.) His head was bowed and his hands crossed on his breast. Jeremias says that what follows is not a part of the usual attitude in prayer; it is an outburst of despair. The tax-collector, overwhelmed by the bitterness and the feeling of being away from God, beats his heart and forgets where he is.<sup>43</sup> The bitterness he experienced was greater because the only way of repentance was to abandon the sinful way, to abandon his job, which most probably was the only means of providing for his family. We can easily say that he was in despair. He did not dare lift his eyes to heaven, kept smiting his breast, and offered a cry rather than a prayer: he pleaded with God to cleanse a soul that was in darkness.

It must be remembered that the tax-collectors, were acting as the agents of a foreign and occupying government. Most of the tax-collectors entitled themselves to the right to collect levies on the transportation of property by paying an advance fee. Then they would make a profit on the transaction. The more money they could get from the transaction, the greater was their take. This offered scope for considerable

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<sup>41</sup> Borsch, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina, Luke*, (Minnesota: Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 272.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

bribery and extortion. That is why the gospels usually link together the tax- collectors with sinners and prostitutes.<sup>44</sup> If we look more closely at the social and moral situation of the tax- collector we will feel better the experience of guilt and humiliation he goes through. There is no wonder, therefore, that he is feeling the presence on him and all the accusations which not only the Pharisee but most of the Jews put on him.

When we look at the historical situation and relationship between tax- collectors and the rest of the Jewish people we will see more clearly the state of mind of the praying publican.

The Pharisee's prayer told God that he was waiting for a well deserved reward, just like many of us do (even those who consider themselves "good Christians"). Many people think that God owes them something, for instance when they ask God after a difficult experience: "Why has this happened to me?" But the publican saw God as having such love that he could even forgive the sins of the Tax- collector. Here the truth once more proves to be right: "What we think of ourselves and our neighbor stems from what we think about God."<sup>45</sup>

We can not say that Jesus justified the tax- collector's way of life, in contrary he hated it. Jesus also did not condemn the Pharisee's charity and honor, but rather approved them as rooted in true motive. But the tax- collector had a soul open toward God, while the Pharisee was locked in himself.

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<sup>44</sup> Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem In the Time Of Jesus, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 310-12.

<sup>45</sup> Buttrick, op. cit., p. 30.

# CHAPTER 3

## TEACHING OF PRAYER IN THE NARRATIVE STORIES

### The Story of Martha and Mary (Lk 10: 38- 42)

The story about Martha and Mary is found only in the Gospel of Luke. We can ask ourselves a question why it is given its particular location in the narrative.

One of the major points of the story is that service of others is not enough. We could even say that it is possible to be distracted with much serving. *"It is possible to lose one's soul in a program of highly useful activity. Our service to others must be in a relation of constant alternation or rhythm with our sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to his word."*<sup>46</sup> It is very important for us to know that if we want to be really helpful to others and at the same time save our own souls we must reflect upon the word of God in order to know his will and make our hearts peaceful. Martha in this story is distracted, but it is also possible that she is not giving really effective service because of that distraction. We read that Jesus said to Martha: "... you are anxious and worried about many things" (Lk 10:41). That is true, she is worried about so many things, however, the things do not really matter to her guests. She is preparing many dishes while only a few or even one would be enough. She is too ambitious in her work that she even forgets the whole purpose of her activity. She has forgotten why and for whom she is doing things, she has lost the perspective in which

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

all her activities must be viewed. But Jesus also adds a few more words: "There is need of only one thing" (10:42). Only one thing is needed, and all other things are valuable only because that one is so important. That one thing is the word of God. People look for so many things. They lose their energy to search for luxury, a comfortable life and other things that are not essential for human life.

The story of Martha and Mary has something to do with one's natural inclination. Some people are born activists, others prefer peace and quiet. Some are aggressive accomplisners, others like dreaming. There are so many differences between those two personalities.

When Jesus came to the house of Martha and Mary, he had a burden in his heart. He was on his way to Jerusalem where he was to face a dangerous situation. He felt that his journey to Jerusalem might be finished with death, and therefore he needed some quiet and silent healing. The last thing he needed was someone making noise and attempting to make him feel like somebody important and invincible. He sought the company of someone who would simply "let him be".<sup>47</sup>

This experience of Jesus tells us of the need to be sensitive to the needs of the people at given times in their lives. Jesus was in need of peace and silence. There would be other times for activity.

A similar thing we can find in the Church. Some of the people join the monastic life, they follow the life of prayer; some other people follow active ministries. Both kinds of life offer healing to those in need of one or the other. Activists need a time of prayer each day. Contemplatives have their own work responsibilities every day. It is a sign for us that we all should have time for prayer so

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<sup>47</sup> Alfred Mc Bride, The Human Face of Jesus, (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1992), p. 104.

that our actions may proceed from love and faith.

Janet Malone tries to guess what Jesus was really saying to Martha. Was he continuing the dualism, the *either/or* attitudes of the Greeks that would have been well known in first century Palestinian Judaism: body/spirit, mind/matter, earthly/spiritual? Or was there perhaps something beyond this classic dualism, something deeper in Jesus' words, something that could challenge us beyond our early, and maybe limited, notions of this story?<sup>48</sup>

Each of us has a personal reference point for reflecting on this story and wondering about Jesus' seeming demarcation between the Martha and Mary attitudes. But usually we can see the quiet, listening, recollected, seated Mary, contemplatively absorbing every word Jesus utters. In contrast, we can see Martha, seemingly overwhelmed and feeling resentful, fussing over the preparation of a meal for the three of them in a whirl of dispersed energy and annoyance. Reflecting on these two characters we can say that at the deep level of our beings, we are called to an integration of both Martha and Mary in our daily lives as "the one thing necessary".

This narrative story demonstrates the necessity for both action and contemplation in the life of discipleship-the call of each one of us to conversion, integration, and transformation in our different vocations and lifestyles.

Janet Malone compares the attitude of Mary the sister of Martha to Mary the mother of Jesus.<sup>49</sup> In the Luke's Gospel we read that Martha's sister, Mary, "sat beside Jesus at his feet listening to him" (Lk 10: 39). During that encounter, Jesus told her sister, Martha, that only one thing is necessary- and indeed that Mary had found it. What is that one necessary thing that is integral to all the Mary attitudes that Mary,

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<sup>48</sup> Janet Malone, "Essentials of Discipleship". In: Human Development, v. 20, Nb. One, Spring 1999, p 31.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

the mother of Jesus, exemplifies during the Annunciation? Is it the ability to truly listen? Such listening necessitates a quieting within in order to be open to what is heard, with an accepting respect for the other person. It also requires an openness to being called to change, to risk, to make oneself vulnerable in ways not even imagined. It also necessitates an implicit trust and faith in God that “all will be well” (Julian of Norwich), even in the midst of fear and doubt.

Knowing this, let us now have a look at the attitude of Mary in the Annunciation. She was startled as she listened to the message of God from Gabriel. She was open to God’s working through her, even when she was unsure of what was happening as she listened. In a reflective, contemplative stance, she pondered in her heart the words she had just heard. She came home to her own feelings, hopes, and dreams in treasuring these things in her heart. Mary listened to the message without interruption. She waited for Gabriel to finish giving her the message from God. Only then she asked her single question: “How can this be since I am a virgin?” (1:34).

When Mary posed that incisive question, she displayed yet another Mary attitude, coming from her listening stance-that of going to the heart of the matter in a way that is both direct and receptive. This comes out of a listening, open, risk-taking heart.

Yet another Mary attitude is that of implicit trust in the faithfulness of God, despite her surface fears and vulnerability in the face of the unknown. With this trust she had an interior peace, in the depths of her being, that God was present and was speaking through the circumstances of this event. Paradoxically, in her inner core, she knew God’s presence in its seeming absence.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, models for each one of us many attitudes shown by Mary of Bethany. Jesus’ mother had a listening heart-the core, the essence of “better

part”, critical for the unfolding of these attitudes. As she was willing to both hear and listen to God in her life, despite her own fears, struggles, and vulnerability, “Mary’s listening heart was nurtured through a centeredness—a balance in her life between action and contemplation.”<sup>50</sup>

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also willing to accept God’s word and God’s will in her life amid many unknowns. She was willing to risk, believing in the faithfulness of God: “I am with you always.”

But on the other side we can notice also in the attitude of the mother of Jesus some of the features of Martha. A short time after the annunciation she went to Elizabeth to take care of her when she was in need. Here we can notice in the person of Mary the integration of these two attitudes of Martha and Mary of Bethany. In this scene between Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus’ mother displayed an ease antithetical to the fretting and lack of inner peace seen in Martha when she was in a similar situation of carrying, serving, and providing hospitality for Jesus.

But in her actions of mercy towards her cousin Elizabeth, Mary moved back into a contemplative state as she thanked God for what was to happen in her and through her: “*My soul proclaims the greatness of my God, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour*” (Luke 1:46-47).

After taking care of Elizabeth, in a reflective mood, she intuited the time to move on, to move back to her own desert, thus highlighting yet another integration of the Mary and Martha attitudes.

In our reflection on this passage it is very significant to notice that the ebb and flow of action and contemplation can vary, depending on different factors in one’s

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

life, including our comfortability with the paradoxical nature of the process itself. What is most important, however, within a listening heart, is being in tune with this ebb and flow- intuiting compassionately when to come, when to go, when to move out, and when to stay. It is recognizing that this is God's work within us: "Unless our God build the house, we labor in vain trying to build it" (Ps. 127).

The challenge for each of us in our journey of becoming disciples of Jesus, is to integrate both Martha and Mary attitudes, contextualized within a listening heart in an ebb and flow of prayer and action. This has everything to do with both the desert and the market place, not just one or the other. This integration is badly needed in most of our lives in a post-modern church, and a listening heart is the one thing necessary.

In sitting at Jesus' feet, Mary assumes a posture- accorded only to disciples. "To sit at someone's feet is a technical expression referring to a disciple who chooses one as a master (cf. Acts 22:3). In Judaism this posture was unusual or even shocking for a woman."<sup>51</sup>

Jesus shows how important it is for both women and men to be disciples through his acceptance of a woman in this role.

"The better part" is a listening heart enfleshed in discipleship in which prayer, reflection, risking, letting go, being vulnerable, serving, and being served are integrated in an ebb and flow of contemplation and action in so many ways. Such discipleship requires a lifetime appropriation of both contemplation and action, in which there will be an unfolding of times that will feel more like the desert and times that will feel more like the marketplace.

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<sup>51</sup> The African Bible, "The Gospel According to Luke", ( Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), commentary p. 1751.

Discipleship has nothing to do with elitism of one call being “holier” than another. It is all about conversion, centeredness, integration and transformation of different aspects of our being. Each one of us has within us monk and layperson, cloister and marketplace, heaven and earth, body and soul, integrated in potential. Discipleship is all about *kenosis* and *metanoia* in an ongoing integration of Mary and Martha attitudes.

### **The Lord's Prayer (Lk 11: 1-4)**

In the Gospel of Luke, the Lord's Prayer occurs in the context of a catechetical instruction on prayer. First we have a scene where we find Jesus at prayer, followed by the request of an anonymous disciple, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Lk 11:1). In response to this request Jesus recites the Lord's prayer (Lk 11:2-4). The disciple recognizes how much prayer meant to Jesus and wanted to know this meaning too.

Another thing is the example of John the Baptist in giving, as rabbis often did, a prayer to be said by his own disciples. They say, “Teach us to pray,” meaning apparently, “Teach us a prayer,” and Jesus gives them a very good and beautiful one. Then follows the parable of the “importunate friend,” whatever may have been the original meaning of this parable, in its present context it constitutes an admonition to persevere in prayer, even if it appears that the prayer is not heard (Lk 11:5-8), (what we have already reflected on.)

Thirdly, the same admonition is repeated, this time in a series of imperatives: “Ask and it will be given you...” (Lk 11:9-10). Finally, the instruction is concluded by the picture of the father who gives good gifts to his children and the heavenly

Father who will “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Lk 11:11-13).<sup>52</sup>

Since we already know the context of the Lord’s Prayer let us see what it means to “pray”. Learning to pray means much more than leaving a prayer. Luke seems to emphasize that by placing certain teachings of Jesus “about” prayer just the text of the prayer itself.

Praying is hard work... Praying leads us to lose the self and take the cross and follow Jesus. Prayer moves us to search for happiness in these acts that at first glance would seem to make us unhappy. Yet all people, whose faith, hope, and love moves them to try this despite all appearances, tell us that it works. We must use spiritual means to get what is essentially a spiritual gift. All other efforts are illusory and will fail.

We are given very few indications of what the content of Jesus’ own prayer may have been, but we are not left in doubt about the necessity and importance of prayer to him. The few indications we have are enough to show that what prayer “may mean to us it meant to him only much more. The bringing to God of our deepest needs and most perplexing problems, and in waiting there for light and straight from him; the effective recognition that adequate living deepens not so much upon what we do is upon what we present God to do in us and through us.”<sup>53</sup>

Although Jesus does not propose a set of legal requirements for Christian behavior, his preaching does give us a sense of the ways in which Christians will act. “The Lord’s Prayer combines the future expectation of the role of God and our present life as Christians”.<sup>54</sup> The petitions we find there make the eschatological side of the reign of God evident. They fall naturally into two groups: the first is made up

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<sup>52</sup> H. Hendrickx, The Sermon on the Mount, (London: A Division of Cassel Ltd., 1984), p. 99.

<sup>53</sup> Bullrick, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>54</sup> Perkins, op. cit., p. 85.

-- of three petitions, eminently theocentric, addressed to the Lord of the universal kingdom, the second is to the needs of the children of the kingdom. The first is concerned with what may be called world issues, the second with the affairs of individuals. Both alike are conceived as being in the hands of the Father, the same God who orders the course of history with sovereign power also ministers to the daily needs, material and spiritual of his individual children.<sup>55</sup>

The first petition “may your name be held holy” is related to the prophecy of (36:22-28). Yahweh is about to “vindicate the holiness” of his name which has been “profaned among the nations” because of the sinfulness of the people. The people of God slow in their lives that God is holy.<sup>56</sup>

Very significant in the Lord’s Prayer is the first word, “Father”, to make the prayer more personal: Jesus is inviting his followers to share in his own prayer life; he is assuming that they will approach God just as he himself does.

If we want to understand better the wealth of ideas contained in the word “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer it may be good to look briefly in a wider context at its meaning as a designation for God. Let us select few examples.<sup>57</sup>

In the Ancient Near East “Father” was used to indicate that God is the creator of the world, the sovereign ruler and protector. In the Greco-Roman world, Zeus was referred to as “Father of the gods and men”, and addressed in prayer as “Father Zeus” designating him as divine ruler and protector, and later also as creator.

In the Old Testament, God is spoken of as “Father” on fourteen occasions expressing his relationship to his people (cf. Deut 32:6; Is 63:15-16; 64:7-9; Jer 3:4, 1:9). Many other passages describe him as creator, ruler and protector without

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<sup>55</sup> E. Lussier, Biblical Prayer, (Minnesota: Collegeville, 1977), p. 74.

<sup>56</sup> Perkins, op. cit., p. 86.

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explicitly using the word “Father”.

In the Old Testament the title “Father” has a connotation of God’s working in history on behalf of his covenant people Israel. Secondly, God’s fatherhood is primarily a reality for Israel and not so much for other people. Thirdly, as father, God makes some specific demands: he expects Israel to act with faithfulness and justice. Fourthly, the idea of God as father is finely embedded in a setting of monotheism. Finally, God is occasionally described as the father of the king of Israel (cf. Sam 7:14) and of the righteous Israelites and who will restore the people after exile (cf. Jer 31:9). It should be noted however, that there does not seem to be a single prayer in the Old Testament in which God is actually addressed as Father.

Turning now to Jesus’ own teaching, we notice how entirely new was Jesus’ use of the word “Abba”. It is the address of the small child to its Father, also used by adults as the tender, filial address to a father: “Dear father”. No contemporary Jew would have dared to address to God in this manner, but Jesus did it in all his prayers handed down to us in the gospels.<sup>58</sup>

This is not a private prayer of Jesus, exclusive to him alone: the prayer is couched in the “plural”, not the singular; it is given as the prayer of the community.

In Matthew’s account (6:9-13), the Lord’s Prayer is given in the context of the Sermon on the Mount; Luke’s context seems more original.<sup>59</sup> In his teaching about prayer, Jesus reflects his own consciousness of God; he speaks through an awareness of intimacy with God whom he knows as father, he tells of his emphasis on praise and petition.

The disciples are to pray for daily bread. Scholars disagree over the meaning

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>59</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Lord’s Prayer*, ( Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 6-15.

of the word “daily”: some argue that it speaks of present needs like the daily rations of food; others argue from ancient manuscripts that it is the “bread for morrow” which speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>60</sup> God is the source of bread and Christian fellowship. The request for daily bread we find in the second set of petitions. Christians consequently pray that their Father provide them with a daily Christian meal, the meal which is characteristic of their life relationships and which is open to all. Through this meal which transcends all ethnic social and economic differences, they will bring about the kingdom of God. Eugene La Verdieve suggests that the prayer for bread is a prayer for the breaking of bread ( cf. 24:13-35, Acts 2:42-47), the Lukan term for the Eucharist.<sup>61</sup>

If the spiritual bread is the more important aspect for the evangelist, this does not allow us to forget the literal sense. It is perfectly valid to think in terms of different levels of depth. From day to day our existence depends on the Father who supports us every moment of our life. Therefore, we are invited to renew our supplication every day. More than a mean to get what we need, this petition is an acknowledgment of our dependence on God. This is the meaning of “today”. It takes people in their temporal condition, compels them to become “pious in spirit” and tells them to rely on the heavenly father of their existence.

Another very important aspect in the Lord’s Prayer is forgiveness. This is one of many recorded teachings of Jesus in which God’s forgiveness of us is described as contingent upon our forgiveness of others. Jesus is a sign of forgiveness, and the prayer which he offers his disciples now asks for that forgiveness. The teaching at first sight raises difficulties: it seems to make Gods’ forgiveness not a free act of

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<sup>60</sup> D. Mc Bride, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1991), p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> E. La Verdieve, *Luke*, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 158.

grace (as forgiveness must always be), but a sort of reward for our good effort, good deed. In response to this problem Montefiore writes, that the “for” is rather awkward. The meaning is not: “forgive us *because* we have forgiven”. But rather: we may ask you to forgive us for we have forgiven others. We have fulfilled the necessary conditions.<sup>62</sup>

God’s forgiveness is not conditioned on human performances: God forgives and that is the end of the matter. But the disciples own lack of forgiveness in not suppose to stand in the way of God’s graciousness, especially if we believe that Gods’ forgiveness works through human forgiveness. We can say that “not” to forgive others obscures the forgiving nature of the Father. The key of the whole prayer we find in the first word “Abba”. If the disciple really believes that God is a generous Father, and that there is no need to fear, and from whom we can expect only good things, then the person is challenged in whatever he/she does by the image of such a Father. A generous image of God begets a generous image of the human being, a belief in the total forgiveness of God should encourage the disciple in his own efforts of forgiveness. The prayer that Jesus offers as a model speaks of a God who cares about his own family. The prayer shows us a God who is not distant but is near to his children as they call for “Abba”. The Father is only a whisper away from the cradle of the world. Christianity has logically made the Lord’s prayer its prayer par excellence.

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<sup>62</sup> Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 473.

## “The Poor Widow” (Lk 21:1-7)

At the beginning of chapter 21 we see the story about the poor widow. The story is taken from Mark and originally it may have been a pronouncement story on almsgiving.<sup>63</sup> According to other communities close parables of the story are found even in extra-Judaic literature. They suspect that the story may originally have been a parable that was transformed into the incident of Jesus’ ministry.<sup>64</sup>

Bultman toys with the idea that the episode, may depend on a similar story preserved in Buddhist tradition.<sup>65</sup> He also sensed that the idea of small sacrifices being made by poor people as being more pleasing to gods than the extravagant contributions of the rich is a theme common to Greek literature from at least the sixth century B.C.<sup>66</sup>

Here we notice that Luke once more turn upside down the value systems of the world. God is not interested in how much you give, but in why you give. God does not look at the amount of the gift, but at the spirit of the giver. R. Rohr suggests that it also follows intentionally from the previous sentence about “swallowing the property of widows,” and so we should ask ourselves the question “why” she is so poor.<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to the scribes in their drama of conceit interested only in their own advancement and prestige, Luke introduces a poor widow as an example of authenticity. Jesus is sitting in the temple teaching, he looks up and notices the difference between the gifts of the rich and the offering of a poor widow. The contrast

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<sup>63</sup> R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 50.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> J. B. Aufhauser, Buddha und Jesus in ihren Paralleltexen, (Bonn: Marcus und Weber, 1926), pp. 13-16.

<sup>66</sup> R. Herzog, Der Junge Platon, (Giessen: Topelmann, 1922), pp. 150-157.

<sup>67</sup> R. Rohr, The Good News According to Luke, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company,

is between riches and poverty, arrogance and simplicity, self-importance and self-forgetfulness.

We notice here that the warning about the scribes and Pharisees is addressed to the disciples (Lk 20:45-47). The followers of Jesus needed this warning against a greed for wealth, Lk saw that abuses due to greed were spreading in the early Christian community (Acts 4:32-5:11). Such love of money stood in sharp contrast to the lavish generosity of a poor widow whose only property was two lepta, coins of the least value. She trusted totally in God.<sup>68</sup> Again, Jesus hallows the wisdom of the contrary that one who can least afford to give is the one who gives everything. And her gifts were more precious in the eyes of Jesus than all the others.

We read that "Jesus sat over against the treasury" and he saw the rich ... and he saw also a certain poor widow" There is no indication in the text that the rich were anything but generous. Nor there is any reason to suppose that they made a parade of their gifts though undoubtedly there were some who did. The point is that they gave of their abundance. As Marshall points out: "Evidence is also adduced ... that gifts were offered for various purposes especially in relation to vows and the offerer declared the amount and purpose of the gift to the officiating priest. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Jesus knew how much the various people were offering."<sup>69</sup> But Jesus is not so much concerned with the value of the gifts, rather he is looking at the generosity of the giver: he measures generosity by what is left over, rather than what is actually given. The rich have an abundance left over, the poor widow has nothing, therefore, she is the model of true generosity.

What is the meaning of Jesus' comment about the widows' small offering?

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1997), p. 182.

<sup>68</sup> African Bible, *op. cit.*, p. 1771.

<sup>69</sup> I. H. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, (England: Grant Rapids, 1978), p. 751.

Joseph Fitzmyer tries to answer this question following the study of A.G Wright, “The Widows’ Mites”, which gives life attempts to answer it. First of all, the true reason of gifts is not how much is given but how much remains behind. Secondly, it is not the amount that one gives but the spirit in which the gift is give, the “spirit” is however, explained in various ways (e.g. self-offering, self-forgetfulness, unquestioning surrender, detachment). Thirdly the true gift is to give everything that one has. Fourthly, alms and other pious gifts should correspond to one’s means. And lastly, the story expresses Jesus’ mind on the subject of almsgiving.<sup>70</sup>

For Jesus, little is never belittled. The poor widow is herself a summary of all that is little-the least important, the poorest of the poor people who have no status or influence, the ones who have to depend on the kindness of others. She is among the quiet of the land who await the consolation of Israel. Jesus’ support for the widow recalls the “Magnificat”:

*He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree (1:51, 52).*

The poor widow sacrificed everything she had, and it will not be long before Jesus himself will sacrifice everything.

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<sup>70</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke, (New York: Doubleday, 1985), pp. 1320-21.

## **The Good Thief ( Lk 23: 39-43)**

Death is the moment in the life of each one of us that no one can escape it. It is very intimate, personal and very often painful event.

Luke In his Gospel shows us Jesus who is very compassionate, stays with people sharing their happiness and sorrow, Jesus who is very human. Throughout his Gospel Luke has taken every opportunity to dwell on Jesus reaching out to the outcasts and sinners. These passages form beautiful climax just before Jesus' death. His relationship is with one who is being killed as a criminal. Jesus welcomes him with love.

In chapter 23: 39- 43, in the scene of crucifixion we find the suffering Jesus, dying on the cross together with two criminals. Luke draws our attention to those two. One of them, despairing in the face of imminent death, caught the spirit of Jesus' detractors and joined them in mocking and cursing him. He cries out in a bitter mood, fighting back at his fate with all the violence of his unbridled soul: "Are you not the Messiah ? Save yourself an us" (v. 39). Like the preceding mocking the criminal's request "save yourself and us!" is derisive and cynical, yet Jesus does accept the challenge, for he saves the other criminal.<sup>71</sup> Rather than associate himself with Jesus who stands under the same final condemnation, the criminal joins the company of mockers. A man from whom Jesus might have expected a measure of sympathy in their share fate turns instead to ridicule: he wants to die believing that there is someone more ridiculous than himself. Jesus does not answer the criminal, who is rebuked by his companion for not fearing God- an attitude which seems particularly

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<sup>71</sup> R. C. Tannehill, Luke, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 343.

foolish since he is soon to stand under God's judgment. That is exactly what happens often in our life. People want to blame and be ironic to someone innocent after they have done something wrong and have to take all the consequences. They think it will decrease the pain. But this is not the right way to look for peace of mind and heart.

Let us look now on the other criminal. He while going the same experience of suffering and dying reflects upon his own life. He is able to confess his guilt before all the people and Jesus himself, and at the same time "defend" Jesus. He says: "Have you not fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal" (LK 23: 41). Life is sometimes seen best in the light of death. Or it might be rather "the light of knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" that helps us to reflect upon our lives, as St. Paul says in II Cor 4: 6.<sup>72</sup>

The second criminal declares Jesus' innocence. By his request he shows his faith that Jesus has the power to save, and he connects that power to Jesus' future kingdom. He confesses Jesus as Messiah in spite of his shameful death on a cross.<sup>73</sup> It is one of the outcasts of whom Isaiah spoke (Is 61: 1-3) and which Jesus took at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee (Lk 4: 16- 21). This is one of the outcasts that Jesus previously ministered, who is capable of this unique insight.

If the first criminal joins the rulers and soldiers in mocking of Jesus, the second criminal joins Pilate and Herod in acknowledging Jesus' innocence.<sup>74</sup> He goes on to address Jesus by name- the only man in the Gospels to do so- and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, which in Lukan terms will be the

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<sup>72</sup> Buttrick, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

<sup>73</sup> Tannehill, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

<sup>74</sup> Mc Bride, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

time of Jesus' exaltation.

The "Good Criminal" makes a request that is based on the belief that one who is being mocked as Messiah and King, who is dying as a criminal, really is the royal Messiah, and that shameful death does not end his claim to royal power but is the means by which he will achieve it. He says: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (LK 23: 42). Tannehill states that the criminal who makes a little speech is an important figure in the Lukan passion story, for this is a recognition scene in which the truth hidden from other humans, including disciples is disclosed.<sup>75</sup> The Jewish people had different expectation of the Messiah. They were waiting for powerful religious and political ruler who would lead them to freedom. Instead they saw a "suffering man" among criminals. But the second criminal spoke to all the mockers in a speech that is very significant to all of us, he sees things upright and repents. He utters Jesus' name, which is tantamount to appealing to Jesus as God's agent of salvation ("Jesus" means "God saves"), and he asks Jesus to remember him whenever Jesus should be exalted to kingly reign.<sup>76</sup>

The positive response of Jesus to the criminal's request implies his approval of what he said. Jesus promises him "today you will be with me in Paradise" (23:43). According to Tannehill, Jesus exercises here his authority to forgive (cf. 5:24), which will become a part of his royal power. The phrase "be with me" declares not only forgiveness but promises friendship as well.<sup>77</sup> In Luke's story, Jesus is in fact Messiah -King, not as one who foments revolution against Rome, but as one who

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<sup>75</sup> Tannehill, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

<sup>76</sup> J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke*, Jesus, Authorities, Disciples, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 68.

<sup>77</sup> Tannehill, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

mediates salvation to such as this second criminal: to the “poor”, the “captives”, and the “lost” (Lk 4: 18-19, 19:10).

Jesus’ words to the second criminal, are the last he utters to any man during his life on earth: appropriately, they are addressed to an outcast and offer salvation as a present reality. Jesus promises the criminal a share in his own fellowship in Paradise. Paradise, an old Persian word for a garden or a park, was used to describe Garden of Eden, and later the future home of those who died in faith.<sup>78</sup> Jesus promises the man to be with him in paradise “today”. “Today” and “Now” are very important words in Luke. It means that the Kingdom of God is *here* and *now*. It tells the petitioner that he need not wait for the favor he seeks. Jesus rewards the penitent criminal with the assurance that this day the Messiah will open the gates of Paradise for those who find fellowship with him.

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<sup>78</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke, X-XXIV, (New York: The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1985), p. 1510.

## CONCLUSION

In the preface of this Gospel, Luke states quite clearly the purpose of his writing, “that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (1:4). Luke presupposes that Theophilus and those who read his gospel can already claim some familiarity with the story of Jesus of Nazareth; Luke sees his own task as deepening that familiarity by presenting a historical framework to the truth of the Christian tradition. Particularly at a time when Christians influenced by Gnosticism were devaluing the importance of the historicity of the Gospel events, Luke presents the story of Jesus in terms of redemptive history which took place at a particular time and a particular place in the human story. Luke anchors his Gospel in the midst of history, and in doing so answers a profound human need. Luke presents the human side of that history, by presenting the human side of God.<sup>79</sup>

Luke is writing his Gospel knowing that Judaism has already rejected the person of Jesus and his message of salvation. The Messiah has come, and has not been acknowledged by his own people. Now for Luke, the new people, the new sons of Abraham, are those who accept the salvation offered by Jesus (19: 9). And in this Gospel, Luke frequently reminds us that the salvation offered once to the Jews is offered to all peoples. It is *universal* and takes place *here* and *now*.

Each of us can be Jesus disciple, his follower and acquire that salvation. However, there are some conditions that must be fulfilled. One of these necessities of the discipleship is prayer at which topic we were trying to reflect in this essay.

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<sup>79</sup> McBride, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

This is a challenge for the *modern person* as much as for the apostles two thousand years ago. In order to persevere on our way of discipleship, in order to be joyful and to be a true witness we must pray.

We notice very often that everything gradually changes. A kind of crisis loomed up, at times sudden, usually progressive and slow. The moment when this happened, the enthusiasm of our first experience of encounter with Jesus, was beclouded. It was the same for all of us. Some month, some years, or many years later, our life of faith is invaded by a growing insensitivity. The evangelical values upon which our conversion was based begin to lose their meaning and the emotional attraction which they once had for us. We feel the presence of Christ in our lives and especially in our prayers less and less; instead we feel a dryness, a loneliness, a darkness that takes us farther and farther from the face of the Lord. Prayer no longer provides us with the old emotional support; instead it tries us and leaves us dry. It does not seem to have any influence in our lives, in our activities. It now seems that whether or not we pray all will remain the same: ourselves, our commitments, other people, history. That is why one of the first temptation is to abandon our prayer life.

The great temptation of this crisis is that of compromise. We look for some comfortable position somewhere between the Gospel and the "world", and we become neither "cold" nor "hot". We tend to introduce into our lives derivatives of and substitution for the Gospel.

It is precisely the crisis of Christian discipleship, dramatic and subtle, that prepares us for and leads us to a more mature and decisive conversion. That is why very important in our prayer life is "importunity" or "stubbornness" in our prayer. If we persevere the difficulties, this will bring us to another form of discipleship more deeply rooted in the cause of the Gospel and less in the feelings or in an unconscious

desire for self- advancement and influence. It leads us to another type of prayer, less emotional and sought after for psychological motives, more strongly based on the following of Christ that unites us to his liberating prayer.

Prayer is inseparable from following Jesus because of the motives that inspire it, because of its mystique. What gives quality to any commitment is the mystique that inspires it, or the motives for this commitment. If there are not profound motivations and a stable mystique the commitment will wither.<sup>80</sup> This particularly so in Christian spirituality, whose motivations do not come from pure human reason or from analyses and ideologies, but rather from the words of Jesus heard in faith.

We should ask ourselves a question whether prayer still has a place in today's world. In theory and in practice many Christians doubt the efficacy and meaning of their prayer, in a culture that is becoming secularized; where statistics and technology foresee their future more and more, where human beings are acquiring a growing responsibility for a dominion over nature and its laws. All this has produced a crisis. We do not know how to integrate prayer within the psychological demands of our day.

Christian prayer, however, is on another level than that of statistics, psychology, or technical development. It is not in competition with them, nor is it endangered by humanity's progress. This is so as long as prayer is authentic, that is, an expression of a personal love for God and others.

At the end we must say that the reflections that we have made regarding the nature of prayer lead us to redefine the authentic contemplative Christian. Contemplation is not the traditional image we had. It is not fidelity to practices of

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<sup>80</sup> Segundo Galilea, *Following Jesus*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 46.

prayer. The practices are only a means; they do not constitute contemplation of faith. The contemplative today is the one who has an experience of God, who is capable of meeting God in history, in politics, in other people, and especially through prayer.

We should follow here Carlo Caretto who speaks of contemplation and prayer in terms of desert: "The desert does not mean the absence of men, it means the presence of God." Christian spiritual life means not an avoidance of people and modern civilization, but rather being conscious of the working of God in our lives and cooperation with him.

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