

**St Botolph's Church Worthing**  
**24 July 2016**  
**Luke 11: 1-13**

**Father Roger Walker**

Last time we heard Jesus' best known parable – the Good Samaritan. Today we hear him giving his disciples the prayer that every Christian knows, the Lord's Prayer 'Our Father who art in heaven..' So let's consider just what it is we are praying as we say this day by day and Sunday by Sunday. Our Father is a very significant way for us to address God, for we are claiming a much more intimate relationship with him than when we say 'O Lord our God', that intimacy begins with the acknowledgement that he was the one who created us and then continues with the thought that he both cares for us and provides for us. It is also an acknowledgement, as we say together 'our' that we are brothers and sisters in the same family.

It is the perfection of how relationships should be- and often aren't! Within our human families this closeness to a loving God, which Jesus taught and reflected in this prayer was a complete revolution in religious understanding. It was very different to the feared and demanding personality of God that Judaism taught. There is, of course, a danger with our perception of God as our Father – that we fail to acknowledge his divine nature. Hence, our Father *in heaven* is included in some versions of the prayer. Also the words 'hallowed be they name' – for both of these are acknowledging that although our relationship with him is intimate. Nevertheless God is on a different spiritual plane and a level of holiness to us. He is to be worshipped within the Christian family circuit, and the next phrase – Your Kingdom Come – emphasises this as well. For, as we know, this is speaking of God's kinship or rule over us, which at present is incomplete.

To continue the family simile we are naughty disobedient children and in reality we know that perfect obedience to God will only come when Jesus comes again as both our brother and Judge. This is what we are praying for here: so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Before this happens we, we have to live here on earth and we may need our father to give us each day our daily bread – and this sustenance in Jesus' thought and in our experience is both physical – keeping our bodies alive – and spiritual: drawing us ever closer to our heavenly father. But the closeness of our Christian family, both in our relationship with God and with each other, is so often fragmented by sin.

So we pray that God will forgive us, and that alongside this – very importantly – that we will be willing to forgive each other. For one of the most destructive things in any family is for one member to hold a grudge against another. You might think that, given Jesus' teaching about loving one another and forgiving each other seven days out of seven, that this would not happen within the Christian family. But it does, and we all need to pray earnestly – 'forgive us as we forgive everyone who sins against us' – and the open ourselves to let God

answer this prayer. This is what brings the unity that allows every Church – every little Christian family – to grow and flourish.

Alongside sin goes the thought of temptation, and the most puzzling phrase of the Lord's Prayer is 'lead us not into temptation'.

Surely God is not going to set us up in front of the Devil to be tempted, to see if we are strong enough to resist? He won't, but we need to look at this in two ways in our lives. First, to acknowledge that temptation is a reality in the Christian life and that we need God's strength to resist it – hence the final phrase of the prayer, 'deliver us from evil'. Second, to look at the ways that we translate this and it can be translated as 'do not bring us to the time of trial', meaning please don't let us be faced with persecution that requires us to face up to suffering and may be death for our allegiance to Jesus. That is more real for the disciples than for us.

But even in our lesser ways we can fail to acknowledge and bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ if we feel that we shall be mocked or looked down on for it. We all know that time of trial, when it happens, - remember St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians: 'God is faithful – he will not let you be tempted – tested- tried'. These three words mean the same: He will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. Put our hands into God's hand and we can face far more than we think we can.

Jesus continues from his reading of the Lord's Prayer with words that said to his disciples and to us: be persistent in prayer and God will answer your prayers. 'Ask', he says, 'and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you'. I've told you before that God has three answers to prayer: yes, no and wait. He never just ignores us. If you want to be confident that God's answer will be 'Yes', then pray the Lord's Prayer – for this is how Jesus himself teaches us to pray.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

24.7.16