**17th Ordinary Sunday C**

**By Fr. Jose T. Mudakodiyil**

Jesus often prayed. His disciples often found him absorbed in prayer. So they too wanted to pray like him. So the Lord taught them a prayer. There may be some of us who do not know how to pray. If so, we need to ask like the disciples ‘Lord teach us how to pray.’ There is a prerequisite for our conversation with God. That is humility. We need to realize our limitation before we can make our requests to God. The Lord will never abandon us and he will never refuse to hear us. For, Jesus says in the gospel of today “everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks finds and to the one who knocks the door will be opened.” Once an atheist told his friend who was a believer, “See you had been praying for so long and your God never listened or answered you prayers. So believe me there is no God.” His friend said, “God did answer my prayer. He said no.” God promises to be attentive to our prayer. “Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”

In our prayer to God, the first thing we should ask are spiritual goods – the grace to love him more and more each day and to grow in holiness. God is spirit and he is all holy. So what else is better to ask him than spiritual goods? Ask for them with persistence and I assure you, you will receive them. We can also ask for material things because we are not fully spiritual, instead we are a combination of material and spiritual. But we should ask for material things only in so far as they bring us closer to him. St. Augustine advises us to pray for temporal goods with the knowledge that they come to us from him who know what is best for us. If you have prayed for something and if you have not received it, trust in God. If it would have been good for you, you would have received it. If your child asks for a knife to play with will you give him that? If you child asks for a snake to play with will you give him that? God who knows what is best for us, will send us what we need – what is good for us.

A business man started a bar in a little town. The Christians organized a day of prayer so that the Bar may be closed. Lightning struck and burned it down. The bar owner sued the Church saying it was responsible because it organized the prayer. But the church lawyer argued that it was not the result of prayer. Finally the Judge said, “I dismiss the case as the Bar owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not.”

The key message of the gospel is perseverance in prayer. Perseverance is key to success. Nothing is achieved without perseverance. It was my childhood desire to learn swimming. I could not achieve it until 40 year old. When I was in La pine and I told somebody how interested I was to learn swimming when I was young. The next thing I know is that I have a pass to a swimming pool with lessons paid for. I did not plan on learning swimming at 40 but the opportunity presented itself. So I decided to go for it. It took me four months to swim across the pool while it takes only four days for a child of 5 to swim across. It was the same with learning to ski. During those lessons leaning to ski I spent more time trying to get up after each fall than on the skies. However, I was not prepared to give up. I kept at it until I learned. I have skied all the seasons ever since. God wants us to persevere and not give up.

God always wants what is best for us. So if you want to be happy ask for his will to be done. That is what Jesus taught his disciples to pray for. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Pope John Paul II once visited a man who was badly hurt in an accident. He found this man in great pain but very happy and cheerful. Reflecting over it the Pope said, “The joy in that man was the result of the identification of his will with the Divine will.” This is the best path to follow in prayer. Tell him “Lord, I want nothing other than what you want. Even those things I am asking you at present, if they take me an inch away from your will, don’t give them to me. You know best. Your will be done.”