

27<sup>th</sup> Wednesday in Ordinary Time, Cycle I  
October 5, 2011  
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St. Joseph Cathedral, Columbus, OH

Jonah 4:1-11          Psalm 86          Luke 11:1-4

*“Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.”*

In today’s gospel passage, we hear St. Luke’s account of Jesus giving the Apostles the prayer that is one of those common points of faith between Christians of all denominations: The Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is so rich that many different possible homily topics came to mind as I was preparing this homily, but in light of the fact that I have returned here to Columbus to celebrate my ordination as a priest, I would probably be remiss if I did not spend a brief amount of time reflecting upon the phrase in the Our Father which actually is missing from Luke’s account of it: *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* After all, the priesthood is a vocation; becoming a priest is supposed to be a response to a call from God. It is a choice of conforming our will to that of God; of saying Thy will be done, Lord, in my life. Priesthood is not supposed to be a career choice that we make unilaterally, solely of our own will. It should not be an answer to the question: what do I want to do with my life? Personally I can confidently say that priesthood was not what I would have chosen if I would have picked what I wanted to do with my life. For like Jonah, from our first reading, I was not eager to follow where God wanted me to go. The thought of becoming a priest was about as scary to me as the thought of preaching to the Ninevehites, some of the nastiest, most ruthless people of the ancient near East. Yet after running for a long time, Jonah followed... and the result of him conforming his actions to God’s will was one of the greatest conversion stories in the history of the world. It took me until age 40 to finally say yes to God in ordination; and the jury is still out on the type of fruit that my decision to finally surrender to the Lord’s will is going to bear, although undoubtedly it will be far less than that of Jonah.

But the topic of vocation, of conforming our lives to God’s will, is not limited to the few who are called by God to be priests. One of the great fruits of the Second Vatican Council is its clarity that all of us have been given a call by God, a vocation in life; and that part of that calling is to be holy. Being holy does not necessarily mean spending hours of time in church per week, and it certainly does not mean being boring as holiness is often portrayed. While holiness can include pious actions, at its core, being holy means fulfilling the words of the Our Father: *“Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.”* Holiness means seeking to do God’s will in our lives as a parent, grandparent and spouse. It means seeking to do God’s will in the employment we select and in how we act in our employment. It means using our free time, even our retirement, in a way that cooperates with His will. When we are holy, there can be plenty of room for fun; because one of the fingerprints of the Holy Spirit is joy; and God’s adventures are better than we could ever plan. But when we are holy, our lives are no longer just about me; and as a consequence at least part of our free time should be used for the service of God and His people.

There is one more part of the Our Father that bears mentioning today; one part that is included in Luke’s account of it; one particular way in which God desires that each of us do His will on Earth. In fact it is such an important part of what we are to do, that when we go through the Lord’s Prayer we find one request of the Father in which His treatment of us is dependent upon our own actions. And that is forgiveness. Forgiveness and mercy was one of the most

radical messages of Jesus. While we can see His mercy foreshadowed in the Old Testament in places, such as in the story of Jonah that we heard in the first reading, in the Old Testament there was often an emphasis on God's justice and punishment. Jesus, through His very life, makes it clear that while God is just, He is even more merciful. Jesus came to Earth to save us and to forgive us from our sins; to help us avoid the condemnation that is due us for our sins. He asks the same of us in our relationships with others. In the first reading we hear Jonah lamenting the mercy that God had shown to people who were vicious. Yet we hear God not pleased with Jonah's attitude.

Let us take from this, first of all, the great hope that if God would be willing to forgive the Ninevehites, there is nothing we have done in our own lives that puts us outside of God's mercy, if we only ask for it. And that we, in turn, are to fulfill God's will, in part, by being instruments of forgiveness with those who have harmed us.

As we prepare to receive Jesus, the One who taught us to pray, the One who came to make true mercy possible, let us open our hearts and our ears ever more fully to the voice of God; and let us strive through the choices we make, through the forgiveness we ask; and through the mercy we extend to others, the words that we will proclaim together in a few minutes:

*"Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven."*