

**REFLECTIONS FOR THE 17<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 24 July 2022**  
**The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale**

“On the day I called, you answered me” (Ps 138:3) – these words from Psalm 138 are the touchstone for the readings in today’s Liturgy of the Word. Two threads are woven through the readings that are speaking about prayer: listening and relationship.



Before beginning our reflections on prayer, let us remember that, while there are many names and images of God in the Old Testament, two images are most common. When we see the name “God,” the image is usually of a God who is powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing. As we read the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis, we see that this God creates the heavens and the earth simply with a word. This is the image of the God who calls the prophet Isaiah, a God the hem of whose robe fills the entire temple in Jerusalem (Is 6:1). The second image appears when the name “the Lord God” or “the Lord” is used. The Lord God is very much like one of us – this God is troubled, forgets, cries, and struggles to make a decision. In the creation story of the second chapter of Genesis, the Lord God who creates the earth and the heavens does so step by step and, when finished, takes a break by walking “in the garden at the time of the evening breeze” (Gen 3:8). This is the image of the God who calls the prophet Jeremiah in a calm and comforting conversation (Jer1:4-7). There is little doubt that, in our first reading today, it is the second image of God which is present!

The Lord has returned to earth to make sure that the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are as sinful as they are accused of being. Abraham, who is not a resident in either city, stands before the Lord, daring to come near and daring to challenge what the Lord is about to do. In effect, he makes the Lord re-think what the Lord is planning to do. Abraham asks the Lord if the Lord will destroy the city even there are still fifty righteous people living there, arguing that the Lord who has chosen him would certainly not act this way, “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you!” (Gen 18:25). The Lord responds, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” The wonderful conversation between the Lord and Abraham continues with Abraham asking the same question for forty-five, forty, thirty-five, thirty, twenty, and finally ten righteous, and each time the Lord answering that, “for the sake of . . . , I will not destroy it.”

There are several surprises in this story. First, Abraham chooses to advocate for two cities which are sinful and negotiates directly with the Lord, pleading for the sake of even a few residents who are good. This is a profound example of social justice of which the Synod of Bishops wrote in 1971, “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.” The Lord participates in the negotiation, each time seeing reason in what Abraham is pleading. This Lord is One who cares enough first to discern the truth about what is happening and then listens to and is convinced by Abraham’s arguments.



**Abraham Sees Sodom in Flames**  
**James Tissot**

That Abraham would convince the Lord to save the city even if only a very few of its people are righteous is also a lesson for us in understanding the sacred communion of all creation. In that communion, the good that we do, even if we think it is very little (like the fifty or forty or ten

righteous ones living in a very large city), makes a difference. Our gentle smile for one who is lonely, our acceptance of suffering, our simple note sent to express gratitude, our taking time to help someone else even when we feel tired, our choosing to place another's need ahead of our own need, our quiet connection with a lovely daisy or admiring gaze upon a full moon, our ministry in Huarmey or Puerto Eten or The Gathering Place or St. Patrick's Mercy Home or St. Clare's,



our accepting leadership tasks on behalf of the Sisters, our taking time in quiet contemplation, our joining in global contemplation through Zoom – seemingly little gifts that all bring energy and hope into that sacred communion. Every good that we do strengthens the communion of all creation to which we have been called by our God, helps us live into our role as co-creators of a better, more just and more peaceful world. In Psalm 138, the psalmist reminds God about this communion of all creation which our God has created in mercy and in love, challenging God as Abraham does, “Do not forsake the work of your hands” (Ps 138:8).

Prayer is about speaking and listening, not just hearing but truly listening. God listens – to Abraham and to the psalmist. The wonder of prayer is that God asks us to speak and asks us to listen just as God listens. One spiritual writer says, “Listening is a choice, something that requires attention, an action that requires us to make sense of the sounds, the words, that reverberate within our minds and hearts.” Listening demands silence and attentiveness and a desire to truly know what is in the heart of the other. We are invited to listen as God listens. The poet, [Mary Oliver](#), describes praying in this simple poem:

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch  
a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway  
into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.



In the Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus, “teach us to pray” (Lk 11:11). Jesus’ answer must have been a surprise to them. He gives them the words of a simple prayer which we know today as the “Our Father.” It is a prayer said at least once by almost every Christian every day. Luke’s version of this prayer is shorter than the version in Matthew (the one on which our present version is based). The beginning of the prayer, “Our Father,” makes so clear that all prayer is relationship, our intimate relationship as individuals and as community with our God, a relationship taught to Jesus by his Jewish tradition and taught to us by Jesus. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus cries out in his agony in the garden, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mk 14:36). In Romans and in Galatians, Paul comforts us with the assurance that God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6). “Abba” is the intimate



and endearing Aramaic word that translates “Daddy” in English or “Papá” in Spanish.

The Sufi master, [Neil Douglas-Klotz](#), helps us retell this prayer of Jesus in the context of our new understandings of cosmology:

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos  
Focus your light within us – make it useful.  
Create your reign of unity now –  
through our fiery hearts and willing hands.  
Help us love beyond our ideals  
and sprout acts of compassion for all creatures.  
Animate the earth within us:  
we then feel the Wisdom underneath supporting all.  
Untangle the knots within  
so that we can mend our hearts' simple ties to each other.  
Do not let surface things delude us,  
but free us from what holds us back from our true purpose.  
Out of you, the astonishing fire,  
returning light and sound to the cosmos. Amen.



Helix Nebula *Eye Of God*  
Hubble Space Telescope

As part of his response to the disciples’ question, “teach us to pray,” Jesus tells the parables of the neighbour asking for bread late at night (the wisdom of persistence) and the child asking the parent for a fish. He then gives us the encouraging, comforting words, “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Lk 11:9-10). In this conversation between God and me (or between God and us), we are expected to participate – as Abraham and Jesus show us. We ask, we search, we knock, we show God our hearts. God hears not only what we say, but what we cannot always express. God listens to our joys and our sorrows, to our hopes and our fears, to our dreams and our laments. God listens.

The Australian Sister of Mercy, [Mary Wickham](#), has given us a profound and poetic image of this relationship between God and us with her poem “The Door of Mercy”:

The Door of Mercy is double-hinged,  
swinging in, opening out,  
sturdy, yet easily moved.  
My friend says: You only have to knock once,  
and you only have to knock lightly.

The Door of Mercy rests on the threshold of need.  
Its single key is kindness, which is always in the lock.  
Faithfulness is its lintel,  
hope and healing the strong jambs either side.

The Door of Mercy might be splendidly red,  
it could be an unobtrusive brown.  
It will need to be carefully handled  
and its fittings are locally sourced.

Mostly the Door of Mercy stands ajar.





In spirit and in flesh you cross its threshold each day,  
often unmindful, but sometimes,  
and increasingly, amazed at its potent familiarity.  
The smell of the food of home wafts out,  
the blood of the wounds of the earth flows in.

It is not immediately apparent  
which side is which of the Door of Mercy,  
since they interchange fluidly,  
pain and promise etched sharply on both.  
Blessing is for all who come and go, stay and return,  
helper and helped, all belonging, each bestowing.

My friend says: You only have to knock once,  
and you only have to knock lightly.  
The God of Mercy, whose door it is,  
is always home.

During this coming week, choose a phrase from this prayer-poem to hold in your heart and in your spirit. Let the phrase guide you into a conversation with your God, marked by words and by silence.

We conclude our reflections on prayer as it unfolds in today's readings with lessons from a spider! [Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#) helps us learn from this unlikely teacher:

Spider, teach me of prayer:  
happy with where you work,  
flowering shrub or rusting hubcap;  
the first leap from here to there,  
that suddenly possible connection,  
repeated and amplified,  
the little knot of hope, extended,  
enlarged, layered out  
in the architecture of patience,  
the ever expanding rounds  
more like a window than a door,  
the thinness of your lines,  
yet how they hold morning dew  
and shrug off ripping winds. Teach me  
the grace of not getting caught  
in your own web,  
not thinking or even looking  
how your little feet work the tightropes,  
on your legs as thin,  
well, as thin as prayer.  
And then the waiting, so still,  
the still, still waiting, waiting  
for the tiny bug of God.



O God, we give thanks for your steadfast love and faithfulness. O God, we give thanks for your listening heart. O God, we give thanks that you do not forsake the work of your hands.