

Prayer is at the heart of our Mission
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What do we need to make a real impact?
How many hours must we work to see this neighbourhood transformed?

If we could ask Jesus for a tip to help us in our mission, in our ministries, what would we ask?
I mean the needs and the possibilities of ministry are so many. We could ask:
Lord, teach us to work with children, teach us how to lead worship, teach us how to preach, teach us how to lead home-groups, teach us how to be creative, alternative or edgy for this is a neighbourhood that pays a lot of attention to edgy or alternative stuff, teach us to be radical...

All these are very valid and important requests for the carrying on of God's mission. And yet, in our passage, the disciples, who often appear to be off the mark, ask for something more basic, a need so basic that that is at the root of the church's mission.

Lord, teach us to pray!

It would be foolish for me to try to touch on all the important aspects of the Lord's Prayer in a short reflection. There are already excellent sermons and even books that explore this prayer.

Rather, I would like to share with you some general observations about Jesus response to this request: "Teach us to pray."

Jesus, reply does not have to do so much with a technique or a correct way to organize a prayer, I dare say that we are not even talking about a discipline (though discipline is an important part of prayer)... what Jesus reveals in this prayer has to do with the person of the God to whom we pray and with our relationship with Him.

First, what does this prayer coming out of the mouth of Jesus say about God?

Even before these words are uttered, the Father is already in the business of hallowing his name; his Kingdom is already invading our history, our reality. For isn't Jesus, who is one with the Father, the very incarnation of this holy invasion?

Jesus invites us to make of these statements the hope and the rule of our lives: "Hallowed be your name"... "Your Kingdom come." These are not empty words, for Jesus himself lived and died by them, and as the apostle Paul reminds us: The Father exalted him and at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father.* (Phil 2)

Now, what does this say about our relationship to God?

We can trust him we can orient our lives according to these words, because he has, he is and he will be at work hallowing his name and bringing his kingdom into our history, into our stories.

"Give us our daily bread"

I secretly used to think that this trusting attitude came easy to a person who was capable of lasting 40 days without eating like Jesus did in the desert. But as we read the gospels, we find that the one who articulates these words is himself a needy person, someone who relies on the hospitality of his friends and even strangers, like Zacchaeus, to carry on with his mission. The kingdom of God invades this world as Jesus encounters and empowers other needy people: lepers, paralytics, blind people, among others.

The one who teaches us to depend on God for the satisfaction of our needs lived depending on others to help him, and yet, lived to empower and restore those in need. We can definitively ask God for the things we need. There is no shame in having needs because not only God will provide but, out of our neediness God will use us as instruments of his transformation.

Cancel our debts – for we also cancel the debts of others.

This is the most communal aspect of this prayer, and it is interesting that it has to do with the times when things go wrong.

We have and we will sin against God. Our brothers and sisters have and will sin against us. We have and we will sin against others.

The one who teaches us to ask for forgiveness came to us to take on the weight of our debt. He did it even at the risk of us not fully appreciating or even rejecting the significance of his sacrifice.

Brothers and sisters, know that your debt is cancelled, cancel your neighbour's debt. Preach the forgiveness of sin. Preach the cancelation of debts... Especially the external debt of the 3rd world, which forces governments to use the resources of their countries to repay those unjust debts.

It is to this God, whose kingdom is breaking in our world, who will provides us with all of our needs to the point of giving his body as bread for us, so that our debts will be cancelled, that we can confidently pray... deliver us, deliver us, deliver us.

When I see it this way, prayer is at the heart of our mission. Before we start planning, deciding, envisioning, giving or welcoming... Lord, teach us to pray!

That is why I am so glad to hear that as a church you are going to study and pray together through the book of Psalms. May those prayers of praise, supplication and thanksgiving really show you the heart of God, may they create in this community more space for the invasion of the Kingdom.

To conclude, prayer is at the heart of our mission, because it creates in our hearts and minds the predisposition to seek and to understand God's work from the beginning of time. As a man called Paul Ricoeur once said: "Without a heart that sings the glory of God, perhaps we would not have the creation story, and certainly not the story of deliverance."

By teaching us to pray, Jesus makes our hearts sensitive to God's deliverance. May he fulfill his mission in us and through us.