

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 11th 2017

In today's gospel, we read that "Jesus was praying in a certain place and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him," Lord teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples."

In my imagination, I place myself among that small group of followers and find that I am nodding and saying, "Yes, teach us to pray. We know you like to wander off by yourself. At first, we were puzzled, wondering if you were tired of teaching, or worse, tired of us and our questions. If you need a break, why don't you go fishing? Being alone in the trees seems like a waste of time. But then, as we watched you, it seemed like you were with someone. Although we never heard words, it looked like you were having a conversation with someone. Your posture and facial expressions changed - sometimes smiling, sometimes worried and anxious, sometimes a calm came over you. Sometimes you were very still, as if listening intently. Then we realized this is when you spend time with the one you call 'Abba'! So yes, teach us to pray, we want to know your Father as you do."

I wonder what Jesus was thinking and feeling. I imagine he was delighted to hear that his followers were eager to know his Father, the one who is the sacred source of all life and yet relates to us as a loving parent or friend. He may have been surprised at the depth of the hunger and thirst he saw in them. I imagine he was just as eager to give them words to help them open to God's presence and begin their own personal relationship with Abba.

I think he'd have a much tougher time of it today. Unless he was on Facebook and tweeted regularly, he'd be a complete unknown with very few friends, much less followers. With so many distractions, we are less like Jesus' followers and much more like Jonah in today's first reading -- self-absorbed with our own perceptions, expectations and reactions -- complaining about the state of the world, angry that God doesn't do something about it, whining about unpleasant circumstances and then withdrawing in depression wishing it would all go away. There isn't much time or space for listening or prayer.

Lord, deepen in us a desire to pray. Calm our fears and anxieties, and then teach us to pray, so we can come to know you as you are, and let go of expectations of who we think you ought to be.

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