

In the Name of the Living God: Father Creator, Son Redeemer and Holy Spirit Sustainer. Amen.

We live in an age of communication...and often, there seems to be too much of it.

If you have email, then you know about “spam”. Your answering machine at home, or voice mail on your cell often leads you to the point you want to get on the no-call list. The letter carrier seems to bring little more than ads or junk mail. I cannot tell you how much drama in court is created by Facebook, texting and Twitter. Even the television commercials get longer and louder.

Human communication can turn out to be a losing proposition. Encounters full of prejudice, disinterest, distraction, or other factors that prevent us from hearing or prevent us from responding in ways that the other party will appreciate. We get louder and faster, particularly our young people, as we learn that our world and culture does not listen...so get it out quick and fast. Who cares if you're heard?

Sometimes, we go further and assume that communication with God....what religious traditions call prayer...automatically has the same problems. Maybe we imagine God has a desk covered with pink slips titled WHILE YOU WERE OUT...and ours goes to the bottom of the pile.

Today's scripture readings tell us stories in an effort to help us realize that communication with God is not like that....or, if it is, the responsibility rests with us, and not with God. The gospel reading instructs how to communicate with God, and then tells us what to expect. Here we know it as the Lord's Prayer. What else we can know about that?

“Teach us to pray”, he is asked. In other words, “Teach us how to talk with God.” His response has become a cornerstone of our liturgy for centuries. But to what effect? For what end? What are we really praying for, if we are really praying at all?

We say the words, but what is in our hearts when we do so? If we go through the motions of saying the prayer like robots, while otherwise thinking about the heat or other worries, we should consider it from God's point of view. It is like asking, day after day and everyday, the homemaker of the house, “What's for supper tonight?”. That gets real annoying after a while. Or like hearing the whining from the back seat of the car, “Are we there yet?”. If all you hear all the time is the same thing, would not you get the impression that is all you are good for? A service provider, and little more? Some relationship! Where is the communication? Where is the passion, the heartfelt meaning?

We can get locked into this prayer so that it is the direct focus, and not God as the hearer of the prayer. Like almost everything Jesus does with his disciples, this is a learning opportunity and we should try to understand why and what he teaches here. Actually, this prayer is a model. A template. A window into the most basic and substantive understandings and underpinnings of our faith...with the priorities laid out by Jesus. So they ask him...and this is what he tells them:

Abwoon d'bwashmaya
Nethqudash shmakh
Teytey malkuthakh
Nehwey sebyanach aykanna d'bwashmaya aph b'arah
Hawvlan lachma d'sunqunan yaomana.
Washboqlan khaubayn wakhtahayn aykana daph khnan
shbwogan l'khayabayn.
Wela tahlan l'nesyuna
Ela Patzan min bisha
Metol dilakhie malhutha wahayla wateshbukhta l'ahlam almin.
Ameyn.

This, and everything else he said, was in Aramaic: a Middle Eastern, Semitic language that was common to the entire population of Palestine at the time. At least 200 years before he was born, biblical Hebrew had died out as a spoken language, so Aramaic was their mother tongue, and they thought of and conceived life in the terms it offered.

This makes a world of difference because words mean something. Words mean everything.

For example, we recite the Lord's Prayer as a memorized and automatically recited set of specific words into lines or sentences because that is what we were taught. Look at the disciples request again. Again, words mean everything. Did they ask "Teach us THE prayer?" No, no and no, but that is what we do. We know THE prayer, for what it is worth in our hearts.

They asked for him to "Teach us to pray"....that is, "teach us HOW to pray".

Hear the difference of how these words of Jesus might read if translated directly from Aramaic:

O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere!
Release a space to plant your presence here.
Envision your "I Can" now.
Embody your desire in every light and form.
Grow through us this moment's bread and wisdom.
Untie the knots of failure binding us, as we release the strands
we hold of others' faults.
Help us not forget our Source, yet free us from not being in the Present.
From you arises every vision, power, and song, from gathering to gathering.
Amen: may our future actions grow from here!

What we know and recite is the King James English translation from the Greek version, dated from the 4th century. The King James Bible was published in 1611 and, until the mid-twentieth century, was the only version familiar to English speaking people. But the King James Bible, like just about everything else that we can group into generalized Western civilization is based upon Greek language, culture, education...where the emphasis is on human thought, origination and identity.

For over 1,500 years, the church...dating back to around the time of its legitimacy as the state sanctioned faith of the Roman Empire...has helped to transform our entire way of Christian worship away from the very core center of the Middle Eastern mysticism and wisdom as actually stated by Jesus. All to the point that we, as people of faith, actually miss the point...and miss it by a mile, and have missed the point for well over a millenium.

For example, the Western concept of spirit being separate from mind, body and emotions is completely unknown and not present for Jesus and his followers. It is the same thing about how we almost instinctively separate the sacred from the secular....like it is worse to swear within the hearing of the priest but otherwise not so bad. On a more serious note, it is like how WE, as humans, divide all of creation and all it parts into Good and Evil...whether it is the food we eat, the company we keep, the sexual partners we have. Even our name for the Eternal One is limited by Western thought and influences....the word "GOD" comes from the German word "Got", translated in English to be the word "Good". So, we think that God, by definition, is Good, and everything not of God as we understand it, is NOT...and that definition always moves around.

Instead, all of the Semitic languages, including Aramaic, allow one word to hold multiple meanings, and a tradition of translation arose in the Middle East that led to each word of a prophet or mystic being considered on many different levels of meaning...called *midrash* in the Jewish tradition. Using this method to consider the words of Jesus in their original Aramaic version allows us better access to his Middle Eastern mind-set and wisdom than any Greek version can. For instance, the first words of this prayer, usually translated as "Our Father", can carry several other meanings in Aramaic, so that the name of God is really: "The Breathing Life of All", or "Father-Mother of the Cosmos", or Source of Sound, Respiration of All Worlds", or "Wordless Action, Silent Potency", or "The Creative Process of Each Moment". That, to me, sounds like everything...so perhaps, a better name in being descriptive through translation would not be the word "God", but the word and name, "Everything".

And that is the point of this message. This is not turning into a language class, learning Aramaic. But it is an effort to start to reclaim the genuine foundation of our faith. That this template of prayer uttered by Jesus to his disciples is not a formula, not a recipe to follow to the letter, on and on forever until it really means absolutely nothing of value to us but words we say, just to say them, at a set point every week. This template is really a revelation into the mind and heart of Jesus that the One, the Absolute, the Only Being, is not just God, in literally being Good, but is rather Everything, Everywhere, With All People. At all Times. In Every Breath. Amen.