



Archbishop of Montreal

Homilie

Sunday, June 28, 2020

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (Mt 10:37-42)

Is God first in your life? How?

What was your prayer life like during these last three-and-a-half months? Because the question, “How is God first in your life?” can really be answered by, “Is God first in your prayer life?”

There are different ways of praying and each of them has merit. There may have been times when you spent time in silence before God, listening in all simplicity. At other times, maybe more often, you might have asked God for something. This can take up a large part of our prayer time, asking for something. The Lord approves of it. He said: “Ask, and you shall receive!” Therefore, ask God for gifts. Ask for something in prayer.

However, there is also another form of prayer. This is the form of prayer in which we make ourselves completely available to God. In this case, we are not asking God to help us, important as this is. Instead, we approach prayer by wanting to be totally available to God.

There seem to be three ways in which our lives can unfold. There are not many options, but I can certainly think of three. One way is to say: “My will be done.” And my will may well be good. But the central idea is that “my will be done.” There is another way; we say: “My will be done with the help of God.” Now we’re adding a faith dimension, and we seek God’s help. Still, there is an additional way, and I would say a more profound way: “Your will be done.”

With this, there comes a moment when to pray is to give it all up. It is to give up all our preoccupations, all our anxieties, all our questions by simply placing ourselves in the presence of God and saying: “Lord, your will be done.” And this is not that easy to do! It really requires a conscious effort. Sometimes, we might do it spontaneously out of heart-felt emotion. But more often, overwhelmed by our neediness, we find ourselves petitioning God. But even then, it is good to say: “Lord, your will be done.” When we do, we move beyond all our concerns, all our questions and even our conscious hopes! We leave behind all our thirst, all our apprehensions, all our desires to place ourselves in the presence of God. “Your will be done!”

One of the ways this experience is expressed in the Bible is by all the references to the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord, your God. Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might, and your neighbour as yourself.” First is “You shall love the Lord your God.” Second is “You shall love your neighbour.” “You will love yourself” is third.

The first is “You shall love the Lord your God.” Therefore, leave everything to place yourself in the presence of God with all your heart. Seek God’s will with all your heart because his will means eternal life! His will means your happiness! His will means peace! His will means harmony! His will means salvation. His will means our wellbeing, our good! It is for our good, for the good of humanity, but also for the good of the Church, for the good of the family, for our personal good. God wills our good!

Do we thirst for happiness? If we really thirst for happiness, then let us seek the will of God, because no one wants our happiness more than God does! Let us seek the will of God.

So give up everything to put yourself in the presence of God, give up everything to say: "Lord,

you are first in my life." Give up everything to say: "Lord, let me enter into your plan of love, into your plan of creation, into your plan of salvation. Lead me. Let my life cling to your will, let my life be obedient to your will." Jesus says: "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." We do not normally see the link between obedience and will, and love, and the loving will of God. In the words of Christ, the link is very strong. What does it mean to love someone? Loving someone means many things, but it also means loving what the loved one desires. To love God is to love what God desires.

To love God is to want to be united with God by being united with his will. This really is a process of love. It is neither a process of domination nor of manipulation. These are distortions of obedience. Being united to the other by being united in will is true obedience. Being united with God is being united with his will, which means truly putting God first in our lives.

There are obstacles to putting God first in our lives. For example, we can doubt that He is really with us, doubt that He really accompanies us, doubt that He really wants to help us. Maybe there are moments when we ask for a lot, but without knowing how to put Him first in our lives, without knowing how to discern his will first. At the same time, God is patient. God really wants our happiness and really wants to guide us to eternal life.

Here is an example, a simple but revealing example: being a child. Part of being a child is to refer to your parents. Children ask things of their parents. When we were children, we asked our parents. This is what it is to be a child: it is to ask your parents. But how do parents respond? Do parents agree to every request of their child? Yes, when they see it is good. But when harmful, maybe a toy for which the child is too young, they say: "Too soon. When you are older."

Maybe the child does not want to go to bed. If too young to stay up late, they respond: "No, when you are bigger, then you will go to bed later."

"But my big brother goes to bed late," says the child. "Later, when you are older, you will stay up longer, too."

Parents guide their children in fulfilling their desires. They want to guide them on the road to maturity, the road to happiness and the road of life.

God also says: "Not now. Later." Sometimes He says: "No, this is not the way. This is for your own good; it is better like this." Therefore, to seek the will of God is to seek what is truly good for us.

Life presents many mirages. A mirage is a very powerful image: Imagine being in the desert, being very thirsty. Suddenly, we see water on the horizon. Desire convinces us that it is real, but when we arrive, there is no water; only sand runs through our fingers. Such are the mirages of life. Sometimes, there are attractive promises of happiness. Alas, they are not. We get what we want but we are left with a pounding head and disappointment. Putting God first in our lives is the best way to uncover what is truly good for us. It is paradoxical. By putting love of self third, after God and neighbour, we attain true love of self and what is truly good for oneself and for each human being.

Yes, we might respond that it is good to love others, but what about Jesus' warning in the Gospel when He says: "Love me more than you love your parents! Love me more than you love your children!" Is not the love of parents still important? Is not the love of children still important? But what He says is that "if you want to truly love your parents and your children, totally and without counting the cost, put me first. I will fill you with love for your parents and your children. If you

want to love your husband or your wife generously and without asking for any return, committed, really caring, accompanying the other in mutual self-giving, if you want this, well then, put me first, and I will give you the grace to love truthfully, to love completely, to love tenderly and to love forcefully.” In the end, putting God first is not only a challenge, it is also the fundamental decision to put God’s plan first. However, it is also receiving from God the grace to live this plan and the strength to love as He calls us to love.

Throughout the entire Bible, God’s commandment is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might, and your neighbour as yourself.” In the Gospel, Jesus brings another dimension – in a matter of speaking – by the fact that He is the Son of God made man. In the Gospel, to love God is to have faith in Jesus Christ and to put Him first in our life, because Jesus Christ is the Son of God made man! Now, the love of

the other, the love of our neighbour becomes “Love one another, as I have loved you.” And we know how much He loved us! He loved us by giving up his life for us. Therefore, “Love one another, as I have loved you. I loved you by giving my life for you. Love one another by giving your life for another.” But all of this is possible only if God is first. All this is possible only if Jesus Christ is first. And all this is possible only if we live by the grace of God!

To put God first is to seek the will of God, but it is also to accept our need for God’s grace to love truthfully all those whom we ought to love! Unassisted, we are left to our own weaknesses and limitations. Therefore, putting God first is worth it.

Now we find ourselves at this Eucharistic celebration, at this Mass. After three-and-a-half months of confinement, our prayer life has become more intense, maybe more intense in the sense that we have prayed more. Sometimes it was easy to pray perhaps, but at other times, not as easy. At other times, it required an effort, because we were caught up in watching television or using our computers, tablets or cell phones. It is hard to quit all this in order to seek the presence of God. Therefore, the fight becomes more intense! Prayer becomes a more intense struggle. It is worth it, as putting God first is putting love first. Putting God first is putting truth first. Putting God first is putting goodness first. Putting God first is to accept God’s gift of beauty, goodness and truth. To live by God’s grace is to be transformed to love the people around us with more kindness, with more honesty, and with more generosity.

Let us learn to pray anew. Let us learn to be silent and listen to God, in all simplicity. Let us also learn to petition God without ceasing. Let us learn to leave everything behind to rest in the presence of God alone. Let us be available to seek his will and be open to his grace.

The confinement has literally put us in “pause mode.” Nevertheless, the mission of love continues. The mission to love never stops. The call to love God never stops. The call to love each other, beginning with our family, never stops. God’s grace never stops. Service, the spirit of service never stops. Life continues and love continues. Serving one another continues. Is it easy? No. It is demanding. It is demanding because being human is being in

relationship with others. Human beings exist as individuals in their own right. Yet, at the same time, they exist as individuals open to the other. They exist to encounter the other, to encounter God, to encounter one another.

All that we have learned over the past three-and-a-half months about communicating — online, by telephone, by radio or television, or by other means — is important. But we know that it does not replace direct contact with others.

This period of hardship continues. However, we are not facing this alone. I like to think that all those who are sick in hospitals or elsewhere, in residences, those at the end of their life, all those whom no one was permitted to visit, I like to think, and I believe with all my heart, that God visited them.

A week ago, when it was again possible to visit the sick, I went to see someone in the hospital. In the same room, there was a woman who had been there for three months. For three months, she had been there. For three months, no one could visit her! What struck me, what I found extraordinary is that she had been alone and sick in her hospital bed, receiving good nursing care but without physical contact with her family, yet in her eyes was the most astonishing expression of serenity. They expressed inner peace, serenity that I found incredible! As a man of faith, I was certain that I saw in her eyes the fruit of God's grace. Isolated from her family, even cut off from her family, but God was with her. And God has been with us since the beginning of this pandemic as He was before and will continue to be.

Let us continue to rely on Him and believe that we will continue to grow from this experience. This pandemic is an opportunity for personal growth. We can emerge from it having grown in grasping the meaning of our life; we can emerge having grown in our own family relationships; we can emerge, quite simply, having grown in our ability to recognize our weaknesses. Too much of life is about running away from and not even recognizing our weaknesses! But if we were able to grow in recognizing our weaknesses, we truly grew because someone was ready to welcome us in our weaknesses. This is the Lord! Now, having recognized our weakness and fragility, our love grows in humility. Perhaps we have become more humble through this pandemic. When we become more humble, we love more truthfully. In humility, we love others for being the other, rather than what we want them to be for us.

So, let us keep moving forward as the marathon continues. It is like a marathon. In a marathon – although I'm not a marathon runner, I have seen them in action – the runners find ways to maintain their strength along the entire way. They adopt a steady, sustainable rhythm. If they were to begin at full speed, they could not make it to the end! So, they pace themselves. Let us also find our rhythm, our pace, to furnish what we need to strengthen us, both human support and spiritual support. Find your rhythm. Move forward. Stay committed to the mission, the mission to love.

We are going to come out of it. When it is over, it will have been an opportunity to renew our willingness to love, to give generously, to give freely. It will have been an opportunity to renew our acceptance of God's grace, because experiencing our limitations and weaknesses day after day, week after week, month after month will have been an opportunity to learn how to rely more fully on the grace of God. Let us pray for each other. Let us pray for the whole Church. Let us pray for all of humanity, because the Church does not exist for herself but so that the beauty and breadth of humanity knows the love of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
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