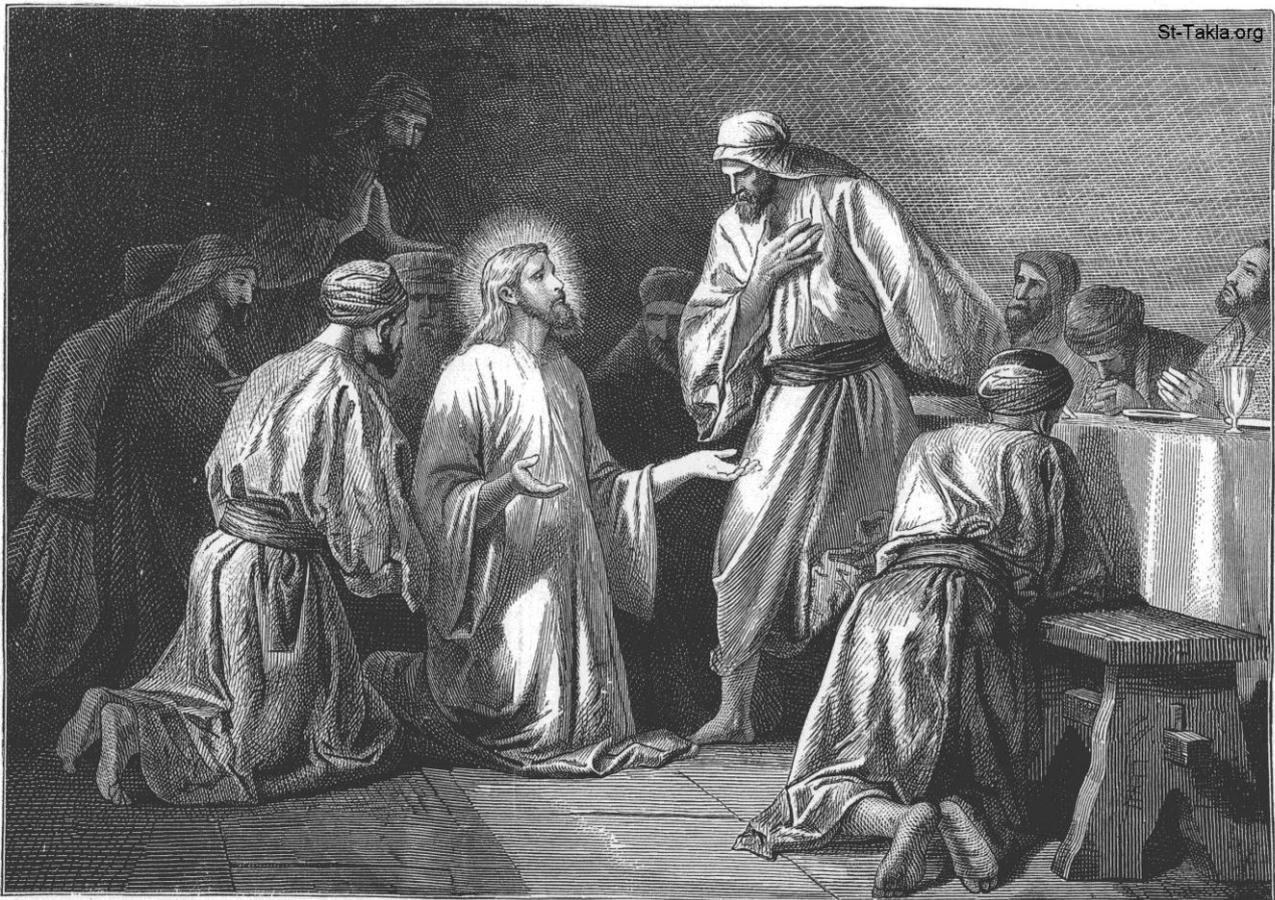


S.P.A.C.E. for Lent
Wednesday 24th February 2021



K6

JESUS PRAYS WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

323

Jesus prays with his disciples Alexandre Bida (1874)

From “Illustrations in the Life of Christ” Downloaded from <https://st-takla.org/>

⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ ‘This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6:7-15

In this illustration of Jesus praying with a group of friends we see some sitting, others stand, and several kneel alongside Jesus. Some of the friends appear deep in prayer, others are engaging with Jesus – perhaps seeking guidance on how to pray, but each is praying in his own way. It is a simple scene which has the ring of authenticity. That is something that the French painter, Alexandre Bida, strove to achieve in his biblical illustrations and he travelled extensively in the Near East to familiarise himself with the area and the people before embarking on this project.

In today's bible passage Jesus gives his disciples guidance on prayer. He provides them with a model, a short, powerful and wide-ranging prayer which has stood the test of time. It has been used in private prayer and public worship ever since, irrespective of time, place or denomination and its use underlines the unity and continuity that binds together all believers.

Jesus tops and tails his model prayer with two specific instructions. Firstly he stresses the need for authenticity. Prayer is not an exercise in verbal gymnastics: it is not necessary to bombard God with verbiage or to use special language in order for our prayers to be effective. Do we really think God can only understand certain special words or formulae? Jesus tells his disciples that *"your Father knows what you need before you ask him"* (v8). Simplicity and authenticity are all that is needed for our prayers to be heard.

After giving them the model prayer Jesus gives a second, crucial instruction. The Lord's Prayer consists of seven petitions; Jesus adds an explanatory comment to just one, stressing the importance of this particular one:

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (v12)

The implication is that we are forgiven in proportion to the forgiveness we show to others. Jesus makes this absolutely clear; his explanation is unambiguous:

"if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (v15)

Why did Jesus emphasis this so strongly?

Perhaps it was because we sometimes find forgiving other people very difficult. How often do we hear someone's actions or behaviour being described as "unforgiveable?" We may even have said this ourselves when shocked or hurt by some situation. This isn't just a question of carelessly used or exaggerated language. There are times when good Christian people agonise over trying to forgive another person for a serious wrong that has been done. We remember great examples of Christian forgiveness - just think of the late Gordon Wilson's reaction to his daughter's murder at Enniskillen - but these examples stand out precisely because we realise how difficult it must be to forgive in such circumstances.

Jesus makes clear that forgiveness should be the norm, not the exception. In various places in the Bible we see God's forgiveness of us as an essential part of our relationship with him, and we will consider various examples of this later in Lent. But here Jesus is pointing out that forgiveness is not just something we receive: it is something we, too, should give.

Our relationship with God is not a two-way relationship but one part of a three-way relationship between ourselves, God and our fellow men and women. Forgiveness is as much an essential part of our relationship with others as it is in our relationship to God. In the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) Jesus returns to this same theme.

Forgiveness is like peace – it is indivisible.

Next time we come to pray the Lord's Prayer we should pause and ask ourselves if there is anyone still waiting for our forgiveness. If so we should resolve to put it right if we are to pray with sincerity and authenticity. And thank God that

"he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"
(1John 9).

We continue looking at biblical teaching on forgiveness and restoration during the remaining weeks of Lent:

Wed 3 rd March	Matthew 5:21-26	Reconciliation
Wed 10 th March	Luke 15:11-32	Restoration
Wed 17 th March	John 7:53-8:11	No Condemnation
Wed 24 th March	Mark 11:20-26	Faith and Forgiveness
Wed 31 st March	Luke 23:32-43	Pardon

*The next S.P.A.C.E reflection will be posted on Wednesday March 3rd
and there will be one every week in Lent*

A prayer for this week, from the Diocese

Holy God,
our lives are laid open before you:
rescue us from the chaos of our sin
and through the death of your Son
bring us healing and make us whole
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

..and a hymn on prayer

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.
2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
3. Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge,
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.
4. Blessed Saviour, Thou hast promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear
May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to
Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright unclouded there
will be no need for prayer
Rapture, praise and endless worship
will be our sweet portion there.

Joseph M Scriven (1857)

