

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Lord, Teach Us How To Pray

In several places in the Gospel we might ask, *How do you know?* For instance, Mark reports the testing of Jesus in the desert very simply, as a plain fact. But in Matthew and Luke we get three specific temptations, expressed as a dialogue between Jesus and Satan. *How do they know?* Well, you soon notice that the Satanic side of the story reflects quite precisely three crisis-incidents in the Exodus story: the grumbling about hunger, the Golden Calf, and the incident where Moses strikes the rock at the Waters of Dissension. In reply, the words Jesus speaks are not new. They're all taken from two places in the Book of Deuteronomy (chapters 6 and 8) where Moses is exhorting the people to learn from their experience in the desert. Another example would be the Gethsemane story. Jesus went away from his disciples, fell on his face or knelt, and said these words. *How do we know?* Once more, look at the words he says, and you will find that he begins by saying *Father*, and progresses to saying *Thy will be done* - which gives us the answer. The evangelists knew what Jesus *would* say in prayer, because of the Lord's Prayer which had been handed down to them in the tradition, and which they were already using daily in the early Church.

### The Priestly Prayer

Today's Gospel is part of the prayer Jesus says, at the end of all his teaching and ministering, in the Gospel of John. It gives us a window into what Jesus knew and thought at the last moment before his arrest. *How do we know?* Certainly no stenographer was standing by, and the prayer as we have it is 26 verses long. It surely represents the fruit of long reflection by the Church, and by the Evangelist, on the meaning of the Passion and Death of Jesus. We must remember that Jesus says, as he washes the feet of the Twelve, *Now you do not understand what I am doing. Later you will understand. We should interpret what I am doing to mean not just the washing, but the whole Passion. It is in reflection on the Passion that we come to understand Jesus; and it takes a lot of time - not just my time or yours, but the Church's time - for the true meaning to become clear. We could say that the meaning is still becoming clear, as it comes home in the lives of more and more of Jesus' disciples - that means us. When we read the words of the*

Priestly Prayer, we have a contribution of our own to make to its ultimate meaning; after all, the prayer of Jesus is the Eucharist, and we who share in the Eucharist are being formed in this sacrifice, caught up in this prayer. We are, if you like, part of the meaning ourselves. In only one place in the four Gospels do the disciples say: *Teach us to pray*. In one way, we might say this is the life-work of Jesus: to teach the world how to pray is to lead humanity as a whole into the heart of God: the whole mission of Jesus.

### The Heart Of Jesus

So when you read John 17, the final prayer, you can see this perfect understanding of his death, his "going to the Father", with all that it means for us, his brothers and sisters. It begins, as all his prayer begins, *Father*. It recasts familiar phrases: *I made your name known to them, they have kept your word* (the fulfilment of *hallowed be thy name*): *I have glorified you on earth and finished the work you gave me to do* (the fulfilment of *thy will be done on earth*); as we pray to be given the bread of life in the Our Father, Jesus says: *Let me give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to me*. Where the Lord's Prayer prays for our forgiveness, Jesus says: *Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one*. Finally, echoing *Deliver us from evil*, he says: *Protect them from the evil one: consecrate them in the truth*. In fact, the whole prayer can be seen as a spelling-out of the Our Father, in the Easter setting of death and life. It is a place for endless meditation, because it truly shows us how the dying of Jesus was in perfect harmony with his life and the way he explained his mission. It doesn't matter much what the words say. A single beat of the heart of Jesus makes us one with the Father. You could think that Jesus Christ is our whole prayer to the Father; acting as our priest, his very being unites us, Creator and creatures. In him the whole work of salvation is already completed, as soon as his human life is completed. He himself said that this wouldn't be until he had died - because human beings always die. As the Letter to the Ephesians puts it, "He is the peace between Jew and Gentile, uniting them both in a single body and reconciling them to God. Through him we all have our way to come to the Father."  
*Fr Philip*