**The Very Revd Dominic Barrington, Dean of York, reflects on Luke 11.1-13 for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, 27th July.**

My faith was formed in a church very much in the sacramental tradition of the Church of England, and it became really important to me in my late teens. And to my joy, my lifelong joy, I stumbled across what is properly known as the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Often, by way of shorthand, simply known as ‘confession’.

One of the most significant spiritual events of my young life was making my first confession, which I think was when I was around the age of 17 or 18. With what were probably fairly typical teenage preoccupations, I compiled a long list of things about which I felt sorry or ashamed and reeled these off to a wise, mature, long-suffering priest. In about what was probably minute 35 or something - at least it felt like that - I mentioned, almost as a passing comment, ...”and I don't really pray very much.” When he reflected back to me some wise counsel, he put in a relative position many of the things which made me feel sorry or ashamed, and he said, “But perhaps we should talk more about the fact that you say you barely ever pray.” That singled me out from the people who were talking with Jesus in that Bible reading.

‘Teach us how to pray as John taught his disciples,’ they say, but let's not lose sight of the fact these were people who were regular, pious Jews, who had already been going around for some while with an extremely pious and observant Jew, Jesus himself. They were looking for something extra on top of what would have been a core part of their life. And thus, we get the dialogue that I have just read that is set for this Sunday's Gospel. Some of it seems too easy, and some of it, I think, seems too difficult at first glance, because we have been saying the Lord's Prayer ever since. Even if it is in Matthew's more polished and slightly longer version than the Lucan version set for this week. But we have been reciting this by rote, which I have to say, I don't think personally was Jesus’s intention. More probably, I think he was encouraging them to focus on some particular issues that bore constancy and perseverance in prayer.

But then, there is the fact that it feels so often as if prayer isn't answered. All of us, I am certain watching this video will have been praying unceasingly for peace in Ukraine and in the Middle East for the last 2 or 3 years, and the war still rages. There is something that we have to wake up to in terms of spiritual maturity if we are properly going to be Jesus’s disciples. We have to be able to cope with what seems to be the hard bit, as well as the easy bit.

Luke gives us the clue, especially if you go back and read the passage I just read in Matthew's version where it is almost word for word the same, the passage about the gifts you give or don't give your children. But at the climax of that passage, Matthew has Jesus saying, “How much more will our heavenly father give good things to those who ask him?” which is a rather vague, and I think, not very helpful, choice of words. Luke's account that we are blessed to be reminded of this week, Luke talks about the gift of the Holy Spirit from which everything else flows; our very urge to be disciples, our encouragement, and our strength, and our wisdom, and our maturity. We live in a broken, sinful world, and while there is human agency working against God's wishes, wars will be a regular part of human existence. But we are encouraged to pray for the Holy Spirit and to use the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us partner with God and discern God's will in everything that we pray for and in everything that we do.

It's not going to be easy. It is about more than simply reciting a pattern of words. But it is the call to true discipleship, which is what Jesus’s friends were seeking and what we, I am sure, are seeking now.

So let us pray. Loving, provident father, you shower us with gifts. Help us as we pray, with familiar words or with the groanings of our hearts, help us to pray always with and for the Holy Spirit, that we may grow as your disciples in Jesus’s name. Amen.