

## **PRAYER - GOD DOES RESPOND**

How often has one prayed as hard as they could and as long as they could and seemingly God has a deaf ear! Then finally one comes to the conclusion that God did answer their prayer; it was a definite NO! This is a very common experience and almost everyone has had it happen to them. For most, there is an acceptance of God's answer and they will go on with their lives but there is a deep feeling of disappointment which in turn in many ways tests their faith in God. So life goes on and what one was praying for with such hope fades into the distant past. Yet it may be some time later, even some years later, that one reflects on that distant period and then realizes that the problem, or whatever they were praying for, did somehow turn out quite well, but in a very different and surprising way, certainly not in the way they had hoped for or expected. The general tendency then is to chalk it all up to good luck or good fortune. The fact that it might just have been God's doing all along is forgotten.

The first reading and the Gospel in today's Mass all revolve around the meaning and power of prayer. The first reading taken from the book of Genesis, recounts an encounter with God which Abraham experienced on his way to the fabled cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Abraham's relatives or friends, Lot and his wife and children lived. The two cities were notorious among all the people of the land as being the ultimate symbol of sin and evil. Somehow God was with Abraham along with some others who were all traveling to the two cities. When God joined Abraham along the way he spoke with him of how great was the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah that He Himself had decided to go there and determine just how great were the sins reported to him. This leads Abraham to begin questioning him as to just how far He would go in punishing these two cities. "If fifty people could be found to be blameless, would he still destroy the cities punishing the fifty Blameless one?" And he pleads with God to spare the fifty. Eventually God declares that he will spare the cities for the sake of the fifty. But Abraham continues, not once, but several times asking the same question, each time lowering the number of innocent people until finally getting God to spare the cities for the sake of only ten innocent people.

Note how Abraham was fearless in arguing with God to spare the cities. He didn't just plead once, but a number of times, each time trusting in not only the mercy of God but also in God's relationship with himself. For the sake of his friend Lot, Abraham was going the whole nine yards. In the end, God did destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, not finding any innocent people there once Lot and his family left. The relationship Abraham had with his God was a very real and deep relationship based on love and trust and above all, on faith in God. Abraham knew he could trust and be totally open with his God. He also knew that the mercy of God went far beyond human mercy. Abraham knew and believed that there was absolutely no limit to God's mercy, provided that one would just ask for it.

In the Gospel for today, Christ starts out with a different kind of parable. A man along with his family, a wife and kids, have retired for the night and are all tucked in. Then in the middle of the night a loud pounding on the door. Who the Hades could that be? Looking out the window, he sees his neighbor who then explains that he needs some food for a friend who has just arrived and is hungry. The father in no uncertain terms tells him to forget it, that he and his family are all asleep

and he had no intention of letting anything disturb them. But the neighbor simply ignores the evidence and continues to pound on the door. It is not long before the head of the house goes down and gives him what he wants, simply to get rid of him so that he and his family could get back to sleep. Note how Jesus then points out that it was not friendship that finally caused him to get up and give his neighbor what he wanted but rather his persistence. Without openly stating it, Jesus says that when it comes to asking God for something, persistence does and always will pay off.

It is then that Jesus goes even further in talking about not only the need to pray but also the need to be persistent and have a deep faith in God. Jesus begins to speak of prayer in a way that should convince even the most skeptical of believers about the power of prayer. "I tell you," he says, "ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Nowhere does Jesus even hint that the answer might just be a divine NO! No place in the entire book of the Bible is there any hint that God turns away from prayer and turns away from saying yes. The question is, really, why do we humans almost insist that God has the option of saying NO. It is very clear that it is totally the opposite. He has chosen to always say yes! But almost always his "Yes" is not in the way one expects; in fact, it is usually always in the way least expected, but again always the best possible way, not just from the way God thinks, but the way he knows will work out best for all persons concerned.

Then Jesus goes even further, reinforcing his words by adding: "Everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds; the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Just how much stronger can Jesus make it regarding praying to God? But he does add something even stronger: "What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Without saying it, Jesus is adding one element to prayer that is essential, namely, the element of faith and trust. Now it takes a bit of humility (humility is really admitting things as they are) to accept all this. And acceptance demands more than just prayers of petition; it demands simply prayer in its essential and fundamental meaning, communication with God with love and trust ever present. How does one get to know their best friend? By talking with them and above all, listening to them. Communication is and must always be a two way street. This is not complicated, but it does take some effort on one's part - reading a paragraph or two from scripture and then not only thinking about it but also talking in one's heart about it with God. One does not do this with the radio blasting away, the TV on or one's cell phone constantly ringing. Intimate communication needs silence and relaxation. The first time one tries this it will seem strange, but after a while it is something one looks forward to. It will be amazing just how much God will say to you in your heart. Slowly the greatest of friendships will grow and develop with Jesus and with God. And one will then begin to hear the "Yes" of God.

This kind of prayer is not just for Priests, Religious, Monks and Hermits. It is something practiced by more ordinary people than one thinks. It is not exactly shared with others, yet it will in fact be shared through one's actions and living one's faith. Just as love and friendship make one more human, just imagine what a relationship with God will do for one's whole life!

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