

PRAYER - PATIENCE - PERSISTENCE - PERSEVERENCE

How often has one resorted to prayer only in the end admitting that God really did listen and answer their prayer but with a resounding NO! This has been the experience of almost every believing Christian, every believing Catholic. And the final reaction is almost always one of total acceptance of God's will. But is that really the way it should be? Not once but several times, Jesus made it quite clear that when one prays sincerely to God, their prayer will be answered. "Ask, and you shall receive! Seek and you shall find! Knock and it shall be opened! He leaves absolutely no doubt as to how he will accept one's prayer. The question then remains as to whether or not God keeps his word. As a true believer and follower of Jesus, one certainly cannot just turn away and without any explanation accept the fact that just perhaps Christ said no. That goes against everything that Christ said in his lifetime. He was always most positive in everything he said, never beating around the bush, never covering up what he really meant.

Christ never once played games in his teaching. He meant every word he said. Given this as a fact then one is presented with a real problem since the experience of almost everyone is the reality that their prayers seem almost always not to have any effect, seem most times to be ignored by God. How then can one put all their trust in God's word? A good question but the reality is that everyone does continue to trust in the Lord, does continue to pray for answers to serious problems. The faith of so many is a deep reality and in spite of a seeming deaf ear of God, most continue to trust in him. This is a great tribute to the power of faith but perhaps even more a tribute to a deep love one has for God and his Son, Jesus Christ, trusting in both and believing in the end they will one day welcome them into their kingdom.

For a moment, consider another fact of our faith in prayer which almost everyone overlooks, a fact that can strengthen one in their faith. When one prays for some solution to some difficult problem whatever it may be, one generally has a good idea of how they want it all to work out. But as time goes on and life continues, the problem slowly drifts away and somehow things finally get worked out and life goes on quite smoothly for a while. But perhaps years later as one reflects on the past and recalls the serious problem which they all prayed so hard to have the Lord solve they begin to realize that the eventual solution was something no one had thought about or even imagined, but in fact it was the absolute best way for everyone concerned. Once one reflects this way and begins to marvel on how it all worked out, they forget how hard they all prayed way back then. And then everyone begins to say how lucky they all were, how fortuitous the unexpected happened. But note that no one ever thinks that just maybe it was God working all alone to bring about the best solution, not just luck. Yes, he was answering the prayers, but in a way that would really solve everything.

We live in a society today where almost everything happens in an instant and we expect it to be so. With the onset of computers, our world has changed with fast food on almost every other corner, with on line banking, with on line shopping, on-line entertainment and the list goes on and on. It is all now something we all expect, even demand. One might even wonder if God has caught up with our modern world! Why do we expect immediate answers to our prayer? Why do we act

as if God owes us this modern day nicety? We are all tempted at times to simply say, "Get with it. God!!!"

The fact is that God is infinitely patient. He created the universe over 13 billion years ago, letting everything work according to the laws of nature to give us today the marvels that surround us. And at the right time, his time, he created man. Again we can only marvel at the patience of God. But man at the very beginning was going to do everything his way and so sin entered the world, the universe. God would not let that deter his plan and again with infinite patience waited for the right moment and sent his Son to undo the harm of sin and restore hope to a fallen world.

Given all this, one can begin to understand how patience is a part of God's thinking, and certainly a part of his listening and answering our prayers. Patience must be a part of prayer along with total trust and faith in God. His past history certainly should give us real cause to believe and trust him totally. Patience is not something that comes easily. It takes a ton of trust but one can practice and live it.

But there are two other qualities of prayer which are of equal importance, namely perseverance and persistence. The first reading this Sunday shows the value of perseverance. Moses was on a hill overlooking a battle between Joshua and the Amalek tribe. Moses raised his arm up to God praying for success. But when he could no longer hold his arms up but rested them, Joshua began to lose the battle. So Aaron and Hur helped hold Moses' arms up to God and through such perseverance his prayers were answered and the Jews won the battle.

The Gospel this Sunday is a different kind of story told by Christ. In fact Luke introduces this episode by saying, "Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary." He is telling his followers not just to persevere, but also to be positively persistent. There was a widow who demanded a just decision by the judge against her adversary. He turned a deaf ear. But the widow would not give up and she hounded him day and night until finally he decided to give her a just decision simply to get away from her hounding him and afraid that she might go further. Thus he gave her a just decision. Now listen to the words of Christ: Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then rescue the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily.

Here we have Jesus himself, God made man, telling his followers that they are to be persistent in all their prayers. Never give up! Be demanding! This is really quite a mystery. Why does God want us to pester him constantly? Perhaps it is God's way of having us, his children, talk to him, argue with him, in a word come to know and trust him more and more, come to really believe in him as our God, our Savior, our very best friend, the only one who really knows and loves us totally. With that kind of relationship with God, how can any of us lose out?

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