

Ordinary Time 17C 2016
Teach us to Pray

Today's gospel is a lesson in prayer that teaches us three things. First, prayer should be *simple*. Second, prayer requires *perseverance*. Third, *God's answers our prayers*. *First*, prayer is simple and direct conversation with God in which we speak about those things that are most important. And so when Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them to pray, he responds in this way. Address God as your father and ask God to sanctify his great name and bring his kingdom. After you have asked for what is important, seek forgiveness and deliverance from all temptation.

Prayer is as simple as that. There is no need to assault God with a barrage of words as if we had to get God's attention. God is already present and listening to us. And so prayer is a matter of turning our minds and hearts to God and being present to God in the quiet of our heart. Prayer asks for what is important, and then in silence and reflection it listens to God.

Second, prayer requires perseverance. We need to pray constantly, every day, every moment. We need to ask and praise God again and again to remind ourselves of our deep and abiding need for God's help. To be sure, God already knows what we need before we ask for it. But if we do not persevere in prayer we stop praying, and if we stop praying we will cut ourselves off from the font of everlasting life; we will no longer live in God's presence.

Third, God hears and answers our prayers. This is why Jesus assures us that if we ask, we will receive. If we seek God, God will find us. If we knock on the door of God's mercy, it will be opened for us. After all, if our parents love and care for us, how much more will God watch over and protect us.

But does God really answer our prayers? Can we be so confident as to believe that if we ask, God will respond to our prayers? After all, all of us have had the experience of asking and not receiving. We have prayed for someone's recovery, and they have died. We have prayed for someone's conversion, and they do not change. We pray for peace and justice, and we continue to live in a time of violence and hatred. So how can Jesus say, "ask and you will receive"?

God answers our prayers, but in God's way, not our way. God answers our prayers in ways that are for our good and our salvation. God answers our prayers in hidden ways, and sometimes it is only years later that we understand how our prayer was answered, and why it was answered in this way.

Prayer is our daily conversation with God; it is that intimate moment when we ask, praise, adore, and thank the One who has given us life in Jesus Christ. Without this conversation our relationship with God withers and dies. Without this conversation, we cannot grow in the life of Christ. This is why we pray, Lord, teach us to pray as Jesus prayed: with faith in your protection, with confidence in your love, and with hope and trust that all will be well.