

Today's Readings (17C)

Prayer

Today's readings are a lesson in prayer. They teach us to pray with perseverance and resolve because God always hears and answers our prayers, although not always in way we want or expect.

First, we ought to pray with perseverance. Today's first reading is an example of perseverance. God tells Abraham that He is about to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their great wickedness. Aware that there are innocent as well as wicked people in Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham intercedes with God, begging God to spare the innocent. Because Abraham perseveres in his request, God promises that He will not destroy the innocent with the guilty.

The parable that Jesus tells in today's gospel teaches a similar lesson. A man comes to his friend at a most inconvenient time, in the middle of the night, and he asks for help. At first his friend refuses, but because the man perseveres in his request, his friend does what he asks. Jesus concludes the parable by encouraging us to ask God and we will receive, to seek and we will find, to knock and the door will be opened for us. Jesus teaches us that God will listen to the prayers of those who persevere in prayer.

Second, we ought to pray because God is like a parent who is always listening to the requests of his dear children, even when those requests are ill-advised. He teaches us to pray his own prayer, "The Our Father." God already knows what we need before we ask for it. God hears our prayers and responds to them, although not always in the way we want or expect.

In today's responsorial psalm, we sing: "Lord, on the day I called you answered me." The This Palm (Psalm 138) is a Psalm of Thanksgiving in which the Psalmist thanks God because God has answered his prayer:

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;
I will worship at you holy temple
and give thanks to your name.

Prayer has two dimensions: request and thanksgiving. Sometime we pray because we are in profound need of what only God can do for us, e.g., heal my mother; watch over my child. At other times, we pray to thank God for the blessings and gifts that God has bestowed upon us. Both dimensions of prayer are necessary.

But does God really answer our prayers? Does it make any difference whether or not we pray? After all, God already knows what we need before we ask for it. So why should we ask? Perhaps the simplest way to answer this question is to ask another question. What would our life be like without prayer? Would life make any sense if we did not ask God for what we need or thank God for what we have received?

Yes, God knows what we need. But when we ask God for what we need, we become more aware of God's will. When we thank God for the blessings and gifts we have received, we become grateful people. We learn how to live in a way that is filled with gratitude and love for God. Yes, there are times when our prayers are not answered *in the way we want them to be*

answered. But later we often learn that God did answer our prayer in another way, in a better way, in a way we did not expect, in a way that brought us closer to God.

Prayer is the way we communicate with God; it is the way God speaks to us. Without prayer, our relationship with God withers and dies. Without prayer we cut ourselves off from the One who gives our life meaning and purpose.

In today's second reading Paul provides us with another reason to pray. He tells us that at our baptism we were buried with Christ so that we could be raised up with Christ into new life. It is because we have been raised up with Christ into new life that we can and ought to pray always.

Father Matera