

Homily of Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

The readings today want us to reflect about the importance of prayer in our relationship with God. More than anything else, the first reading teaches us that prayer is a conversation between us and God. God initiates the conversation by offering us the grace to desire to converse with him. When we accept the grace and the invitation, then the conversation begins. In the first reading, God initiated the conversation by revealing to Abraham that he was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their grave sin. Then, Abraham responded by interceding for the cities. Abraham kept conversing with God and interceding for the cities until he submitted to the will of God. This is an important point too. Our desire and prayer may not be the will of God. We need to learn from Abraham and learn how to surrender to the will of God, no matter how painful. Jesus prayed, “Not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

The Gospel begins with these words, “Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’” Prayer was very important to Jesus. He prayed in the desert for forty days before he began his ministry (Matthew 4:2). He prayed on the mountain all night before he chose his apostles (Luke 6:12-16). He was praying when he transfigured (Luke 9:29). He often withdrew to lonely places to pray (Luke 5:16). He prayed openly to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11). He prayed for Peter that his faith may not fail (Luke 22:32). He prayed for his followers and those who believe in him through their word (John 17). He prayed before his arrest (Mark 14:32-42 and John 17). He prayed on the Cross (Luke 23). What is it about prayer that Jesus never stopped praying? If Jesus, who is God, never ceases to pray, mortals like us need to pray as Jesus did.

Jesus assures us in the Gospel that God answers prayers. “And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” This assurance notwithstanding, Jesus gave a parable to emphasize the importance of perseverance in prayer. The man who went to his friend to beg for bread did not give up until his friend got out of his bed at midnight and gave him the bread. If he had not persisted, he would not have received the bread from his friend. Perseverance in prayer means P-U-S-H: which is, pray until something happens.

In addition to prayer of petition and prayer of intercession, there is also prayer of loving communion with God, or prayer of presenting oneself to God, or prayer of losing oneself in God. This prayer is essential for spiritual nourishment and growth. It is food for the soul. Without this prayer, the soul malnourishes. This prayer helps us transcend the level of asking for one favor or another to the level of not asking, not needing, not wanting, but being in loving communion. This is the prayer of Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” This is what we mean when we sing the hymn, “Loose yourself in me; and you will find yourself...”

No one is comfortable with another who relates only according to what he or she can get. We can imagine that our relationship with God based on what we can get is, also, not okay. Therefore, pray but surrender to the will of God; pray without ceasing; pray until something happens; most importantly, pray in loving communion with God.

Psalm of Loving Communion with God: Psalm 63:1-9

O God, you are my God, it is you I seek!

For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts,

In a land parched, lifeless, and without water.

I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory.

For your love is better than life; my lips shall ever praise you!

I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name.

My soul shall be sated as with choice food; with joyous lips my mouth shall praise you!

I think of you upon my bed, I remember you through the watches of the night.

You indeed are my savior, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.

My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.