

Homily of Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 2025

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138:1-3, 6-8; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-13

Today's readings invite us to reflect on the importance of prayer in our relationship with God. More than anything else, the first reading teaches us that prayer is a conversation between God and us. God initiates the conversation by offering us the grace to desire conversing 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 to surrender to God's plan, especially when it is different from our plan. Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Jesus prayed, "Not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Dante Alighieri in his poem, *The Divine Comedy*, writes, "And in his will there is our peace..."

Another important lesson the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah teaches us is that it is possible for a person or a people to place oneself or themselves in irredeemable situations as Sodom and Gomorrah did. The prodigal son teaches us in Luke 15:17-18 how to come to our senses before a situation becomes irredeemable and return to our Father. Lack of repentance leads to destruction. The Lord swears in Ezekiel 33:11-12, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, house of Israel?"

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...'" Jesus prayed frequently and spoke always about prayer. No wonder his disciples requested him to teach them how to pray. Jesus taught them the foundation and the pattern of all prayers which is called The Lord's Prayer. The prayer is the foundation and the pattern of all prayers because of its comprehensive uniqueness. It is a compendium of major types of prayer:

Prayer of thanksgiving and adoration (Hallow be your name).

Prayer of supplication (Your kingdom come; give us this day, our daily bread).

Prayer of contrition and forgiveness (Forgive us our sins).

Prayer of deliverance (Do not subject us to final test).

Jesus, further, stresses the power of prayer and why we need to persevere in prayer. He says, "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." Jesus gives 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 what he needed. Perseverance in prayer is nicknamed P-U-S-H: which is, "Pray Until Something Happens."

There are many explanations as to why God does not grant us some prayers no matter how we persevere. God's divine will on how he hears and answers prayers is a mystery that cannot be fully articulated in human words. An example is Jesus' experience at the Garden of Gethsemane:

"After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.' And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him" (Luke 22:41-43). Did God hear Jesus' prayer? Yes. Did God answer the prayer? Yes. Did God grant what Jesus prayed? No. Rather, the will of God was that Jesus was to die on the cross, so, God sent an angel to strengthen him. A prayer to Mother of Perpetual Help says, "Take care of our needs, free us from our sufferings, or if it be the will of God that we should suffer still longer grant that we may endure all with love and patience." When we lament about unanswered prayers, we are encouraged to sing the hymn:

***When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.***

***Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God has done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.***

***Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by.***

St. Paul states in the second reading, "[God] brought you to life with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond (charges) against us, with its legal claims (punishment) ... he also removed it from our midst, nailing it on the cross" (Colossians 2:14). Placing our trust on these words of hope, we bring to God our transgressions to be forgiven and may we have a true repentance of our transgressions. May God obliterate our afflictions. May he remove them from our midst and nail them to the cross. Not our will but God's will be done. Amen.

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