

From The Pastor

Prayer is the seedbed of faith, and the root of a personal relationship with God. With attentive weeding and regular watering, prayer grows a quiet and beautiful place within for God to rest. Those who pray not only know the peace of God, and God's providential power, they are also agents of God for others.

The readings today reflect this reality. Beginning with Abraham, we are blessed with an authentic and effective interaction with God. Abraham is a very good example of how to pray, and what is possible when we do pray.

Given the interaction between God and Abraham, we can confidently presume that the two have spoken before. Prayer is a relationship that builds in time, with experience. It is rooted in trust and honesty. If we are confident with God, and confident with ourselves before God, then our interaction with God can be open and vulnerable. We will have the trust to speak to God honestly from the heart without fear. In sharing in this way with God, we can anticipate the Lord's patient and generous response.

On the other hand, many pray from a different stance. If we pray from a stance of mistrust of God, or fear about ourselves, this will have a great effect on what we say to God, and how we may say it. Mistrust will not allow us to be fully open or completely honest, fearing a negative or punishing response. The experience of our human interactions has taught us this fear, and we allow this fear to leak into how we perceive God. Our painful experience projected onto God; or what we have been taught about God makes us doubtful that we will be heard favorably. Such moods and dispositions will sorely affect how we relate to God and hinder our ability to hear God's response.

This is not the case with Abraham. He has long been relating to the Lord with directness and honesty. Abraham speaks, God listens; God speaks and Abraham listens. In all Abraham has learned of God, he is surprised at God's wrath toward Sodom and Gomorrah. As an agent of God on behalf of others, and because Abraham regularly speaks with God, he presumes to question God's intended action. He intercedes for others. He stands to gain little himself, but is quite tenacious for the sake of others.

As Abraham questions, God listens and responds. The prayer of this righteous man serves as salvation for many others. If Abraham in his humble human condition can show concern for the mercy of others, could not God do the same? Such a prayer is shown to be powerful and effective.

Perhaps the first and most essential ingredient for a successful relationship is desire, to want to know and be known by the other. In the case of prayer, the other is God. The disciples express their desire to Jesus: 'Lord, teach us to pray'.

Note the context. Jesus himself is praying, and the disciples have been watching Jesus pray. They experience the inner peace that Jesus has, and they have witnessed the miracles he performed. They must be curious as to how Jesus relates to God, and what he gets from the interaction. The implication is that they want to know God as Jesus knows God.

In response to their request, Jesus shares the prayer of his own heart. Because the Our Father has been formalized for us, we think of the prayer as something to simply recite. For Jesus, this was not the case. This is a prayer that is coming from his heart, and Jesus' own way of being before the Father.

To make the Our Father a true prayer, we must consider the heart of the one who prays it. What is the consciousness of Jesus as he prays this prayer? Are these the words that Jesus himself was praying before he was distracted by the disciples?

Prayer is from the heart. It is a plea or desire grounded in love and confidence. Prayer is not a 'what if', or a 'just in case' kind of scenario. Jesus loves the Father, and is loved by the Father. This is what he is trying to convey to the disciples. Jesus wants the disciples, and us, to come to know the Father as he knows Him. To know the Father will teach one to know the Father's will, and the desire to carry it out.

'Our Father who art in heaven, holy is your name' implies that the name of God be holy in me too. 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven', implies that the Kingdom and the will of God be done in me. 'Give us our daily bread' implies that we become bread for others. 'Forgive our sins' expects that we will be forgiven because we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.

Like the prayer of Abraham, our prayer of honest, humble trust will also serve as salvation for others. Is this not the prayer and the heart of Jesus? From the heart of Jesus, let us pray for and intercede for one another in the will of our loving and just Father.

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