

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 17th Sunday Ordinary Year C1

A disciple walks up to Jesus and asks, “Lord teach us to pray”. I know that sounds like a classic joke opener (*‘a man walks into a store.....’*) but the gospel tells it that way. A disciple came up to Jesus and asked, “Would you teach us to pray?” I find that Jesus basically responds, “Keep on doing just what you just did!” What was that? He went to Jesus, with an open heart and asked Him a question-speaking with Him. And don’t we all define prayer as ‘Conversation with God’. Going to Jesus, talking and listening to God, isn’t that prayer? So the man was doing prayer but didn’t realize it (maybe like so often our prayer may be being answered and we don’t realize it, yet?) But Jesus does provide Him some words to get prayer started. Jesus offers, “When you pray, say.....” Then Jesus reveals the words of the ‘Our Father’. So often when I’m asked as a priest ‘Why Catholics do that’ about something, I answer, “Because we feel that Jesus has told us/commanded us to.” So, why do we pray the Lord’s prayer so much? Because Jesus said, “When you pray, say.....” He commanded us to. If we were to visit a monastery of monks or convent of nuns, during their daily set prayer times, (*their formal prayer is ‘Liturgy of Hours’ which consists of seven prayer times throughout the day*) we’d hear them end each of the major hours by praying the ‘Our Father’. We got it from Him, Jesus said here, “When you pray, say.....” So we obey him and say.. ...*praying as He taught us*’. But I am also struck in the ‘our Father’ by its collective and plural sense. Even calling it ‘Our Father’ emphasizes the ‘we’ part of genuine prayer. The disciples asked, “Teach us to pray”, and notice Jesus’s actual words, “give us today, forgive us trespasses as we forgive others, and do not subject us to trial....”) All plural! Jesus is saying that genuine prayer always refers to/affects others-my prayer’s answer includes benefitting others-God draws in the need of another, with mine, to meet them all in one solution.

I am also struck in the Lord’s Prayer, by how much it resembles Jesus famous ‘Garden of Gethsemane’ prayer. He demonstrates prayer as ‘Going to God, and speaking/listening in a true heart to heart (trusting and honest) conversation’. Jesus words in the garden, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42) they mirror the ‘Our Father’ when we pray ‘Your kingdom come’ (Matthew’s version 6:10 adds ‘your will be done’). Jesus is revealing a posture of prayer- a trusting openness, (fully open with intimate lines of communication between the pray-er and God). Sometimes we may feel like we shouldn’t be so bold, or that I can’t express some emotions toward God, but like an honest loving relationship, ‘heart to heart’ means sharing everything-Let it out, open up and give voice to your innermost concerns- God wants you to be you-honest). So Jesus here is setting the pattern, modelling for us how to pray. And this is where the persistence part comes in.

We have to simply keep at it! I like to say, “Keep coming back”. I suggest that it is in the ‘repeat times’ of being together that relationships grow. I can’t know someone if I don’t ever see them or spend time with them. Do I know God, Do I know Jesus, Does He know me? Not, if I have never given the time to it.

With prayer generally, the most important part of it is not how we do it or what we specifically say, but simply that we do it. Keep at it, continue on, don’t ever stop as it is in the constant showing up, staying at it, that God and we, resolve the concern or prayer need expressed. But I know there is a universal complaint we all voice at some time or other, *“I am praying so hard, but why am I not getting what I want?”* We might have the impression from Jesus’ parable story about that neighbor who nags and nags about bread until he gets it, as a vindication of the ‘squeaky wheel getting greased’. But I’m here to say that I’ve witnessed squeaky wheels not getting greased, but just breaking off the axle, flying into a ditch. More often, truly trusting Jesus in faith leads us to where we didn’t expect. We persist in our prayer, keep offering it, but usually over time we realize that our prayer adjusts, adapts, or changes how we are looking at whatever we keep praying over. For example, so often when I feel that I am praying and praying and praying and nothing is happening, maybe in fact, my scheduled timetable and God’s are not the same (God works in millennia - not my minutes). We all know the joke about the man who tried to manipulate God by saying, “You know God how one day is as a thousand to you (2 Peter 3:8, Psalm 90:4), can I have a dollar, to which God told him, “Yes, but wait a minute”. Or maybe the man who prayed “God, give me more patience, and give it to me NOW” So it turns out that God is answering my prayer but according to a schedule larger, longer than mine. Or maybe what God has in mind to give me is so much more than I imagined, I am actually overlooking it thinking it will fit in my little hand, when look up, the room is full of His gift-answer. Prayer does that: it seeks to work us together, God and all of us together-meeting, resolving all concerns as one. Again, I have to ask how my prayer affects other people. Frustrated sometimes about seemingly unanswered prayer, people may throw up Jesus’ statement in John 14:13, ‘Whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified’. So why didn’t I get it? But I have to keep in mind that condition ‘in my name’. Is what I am asking for, something that Jesus asks for- Is it in line with what He does?

Which brings us to the three step process Jesus teach in the gospel today. “Everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:10) Jesus is giving three steps to follow in all prayer. Three steps, ask, seek and knock, and you will receive, find and it be opened to you .

- 1) First, ask, open your heart and talk to God-Go to Him and say what is on your heart sharing what you have in mind. What are we after?

- 2) Secondly, seek it. Make sure you are looking around. What if the delivery is already in progress. How many times have we dug around in a drawer for something to only discover that the item is in our hand, or our pocket already. God often answers prayer in stages, but we have to pick up the piecemeal offerings.
- 3) Third, knock, go ahead and begin acting in faith, as if, yes the prayer is answered. I'm sure we've heard these examples: If I pray for rain, then get out my umbrella. If I pray to have my migraine relieved, have I taken an Excedrin to start with? If I am praying for my ship to come in, am I already on the dock? It will happen.

Above all, Jesus says, keep coming back. Keep at it. Notice that in the 'Our Father', reference is made to daily bread- that is what keeps me in relationship to God. At least daily, I am checking in with Him for that portion for today. I'll be back, at least the next morning, just as God desires it! He wishes for us to always stay with Him!