

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 11:5-13

“Lord, teach us to pray!”

Like a beggar with no shame

Like a child with no doubts

Prayer is how a Christian exhales. Like any normal person, a Christian has to breathe, and so he or she breathes in and breathes out. Unlike most normal people, however, Christians breathe in life and grace, not air. In our Baptism, we were introduced to God’s grace in all its fullness and we began to breathe in life. When we read the Word, we inhale more and more life. As Christians, we are constantly inhaling, breathing in Christ’s life, given for us, and so we understandably also take time to breathe out, to exhale our worries, our concerns for loved ones and acquaintances, our thanks for God’s many blessings, and our praise of His wonderful works on our behalf.

This Christian breathing, however, is not as instinctive as normal breathing. We must learn to breathe and practice it. That is why even the apostles themselves approached Jesus with the request, “Lord, teach us to pray.” We make the same request today, and the Lord answers it, just as He answered the apostles’. He tells us to pray like a beggar with no shame and to pray like a child with no doubts.

The Greek word for the man’s “boldness,” or “persistence” in verse 8, literally means “shamelessness” or “rudeness.” Normally, telling someone they are shameless or rude is not a compliment. It is a chastisement. You want that person to change that behavior. Jesus, however, encourages shamelessness in our Holy Gospel. He in essence tells us to pray like the telemarketer who won’t let you off the phone, or the car salesman who tries every trick possible to keep you in his office, or the teenager who expects his or her parent to give them what they want simply because they want it. He says to pray like a beggar with no shame.

How do you pray? Do you pray? Are you shameless? How many times do you ask God for what you want? How do you ask? Are you confident that God will and must do what is best? If you are like most Christians, and your pastor, you probably have to admit that your prayer life is anything but persistent and shameless.

In our lesson we have a promise. Jesus says, *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”* Jesus promises that the Christian’s prayer will never fall on deaf ears. God will not be ambivalent or apathetic in regard to our requests.

So does that mean we will always get what we want? If all my prayers to date had been answered with God’s “yes,” the Lions would have won twenty Superbowls, I’d be 6’4” and weigh what I do now, I’d be able to fly and impervious to bullets, and I would have married the girl who sat in front of me in the fourth grade. No, God does not always answer our prayers with a “yes,” but He does always give us an answer, and His answer is always what is best. I am not impervious to bullets, but if I were, I would have been too busy saving the world to study theology. The Lions have not won a Superbowl, but if they had, the victory would not be so sweet when they win it this year. I did not marry the girl who sat in front of me in the fourth grade, thank God, and instead I have the best wife I could ask for and two beautiful kids. And I’m sure when you consider some of the things you have prayed for in the past, you also are glad to have prayers God has answered with His “no.”

God’s “no” is not an obstacle to our persistent prayer, but an impetus to it. If God has said “no” to one request, He has another plan in mind, and we persistently and shamelessly beg Him to carry it out for our benefit. Jesus uses present tenses when He tells us to seek, ask, and knock. In

Greek, the present tense indicates continuing and habitual action. It is a way of life: continual seeking, asking, and knocking. Don't do prayer; live prayer, and you will also live God's continual answer.

Jesus also tells us to pray like children without a doubt. We pray our Baptism, as God's adopted sons and daughters. We pray as a little child makes requests of his or her parents, trusting that our best interests will be kept in mind and knowing that we can't accomplish what we are praying for on our own.

Have you ever played with a little child? Have you tossed them in the air? What did you notice, besides the terrified look on the face of the child's mother? It is the implicit trust they have that you will catch them. They don't know they should be afraid. They merely trust and laugh. That is how we live in prayer. Our life is one big toss in the air. Our prayer expresses our implicit trust that God will catch us, a trust infused in us in Baptism and strengthened through the Word and Holy Communion. In fact, more than a few times I have met with a Christian man or woman who was in the most dire of straits and couldn't help but laugh, waiting to see how God would catch them. They had the trust St. Paul talks about in Galatians 4:6, when he assures the Galatian flock that by virtue of their adoption by the Father in Baptism, the Spirit of the Son now dwells in them and constantly prays through them, even when they don't realize it, calling out "*Abba*" or "Papa" to the Heavenly Father.

Do you pray like God is your father, or do you pray like you are talking to the Queen over tea? Are you always trying to say the right things in the right way with the right intentions? Is that how you acted toward your parents as a little child? I doubt it. You spoke from the heart and shot from the hip. You were forthcoming, maybe even too forthcoming at times. You were unencumbered, honest, comfortable, and candid. You had an implicit trust that they would make everything alright somehow, and, even when you were going to them to confess you had done something wrong, you did so with a sure, or at least pretty sure, knowledge that they were still going to love you when all was said and done, and that they would prove it with a hug or a kiss.

Go to your Heavenly Father the same way. *He will not give you a serpent when you ask for a fish or a scorpion when you ask for an egg.* How do I know? See how He has taken care of you as His child so far. He has given you, not only food and drink, but His Son's very body and blood. He has not only pulled you out of the mud of sin, but bathed you in His grace. He has given you, not only a letter about His love for you, but an entire book. He has given you, not only the promise that He still loves you in spite of your sin, but a constant welcome into His open arms through His forgiveness in absolution. If He has given you these greater things, and the greatest thing of all, His only Son, how will He not give you other, less important things, as St. Paul tells us in Romans 8 [31b, 32]?

Sometimes when people get worked up and excited, they have to be reminded to breathe. Today I am reminding you, as a Christian, to breathe. Remember ACTS. Adore God. Confess to Him. Thank Him. Make supplication for yourself and for others. Pray like a beggar with no shame. Pray like a child with no doubts. So let us pray. Simply, breathe in Christ, breathe in grace, and prayer will be problem. Amen.