

Homily 17th Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Gen 18: 20-22; Ps. 138; Col 2: 12-14; Lk 11:1-13

“A Reflection on Prayer”

Last week we heard a beautiful definition of prayer in the Gospel story of Martha and Mary: sitting like Mary “*at the feet of the Lord listening to Him.*” How are we doing in that regard?

1. **Prayer is a relationship** (see the Martha and Mary story), a loving communion with the Blessed Trinity through Jesus our Lord and Savior. We cannot pray well if we don't know the one we are praying to very well. This is why the Church constantly encourages us to study our Catholic Faith in more depth, for knowledge in the mind leads to love in the heart, in God's grace and time. Studying the Sacred Scriptures and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are essential foundation stones in this regard. Study and devotion are both necessary to grow in our personal relationship with Jesus, who then calls us to love ourselves and others in Him: the Great Commandment. In prayer it's not the words we say that are most important, but rather the love by which we say them. Never forget that!
2. Jesus today reminds us of another aspect of Christian prayer: that of **persistence or perseverance.** That famous Gospel line that we hear today, “... *ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you,*” shows us the need to keep at it, even when nothing seems to be happening. Prayer is not magic: that we do the formula and see the results. Unfortunately some Christians do have that understanding of prayer, e.g., sometimes you see in Churches or in newspapers things such as the following: *if you say this prayer for 30 days and pass it on to 30 other people it is guaranteed to be answered.* That kind of notion of prayer as a manipulation of God to get what you want is not Christian prayer. **Christian prayer is a humble supplication of the all holy Blessed Trinity stating our intentions but always adding, “Not my will but your holy will be done.”** Jesus is our model in this, both today in the Gospel when He teaches us the Our Father, the center petition of which is, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven;* and then in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

when He cried to the Father, “*Father, if it is your will, take this cup (of suffering) from me; yet not my will but yours be done.*” **Our life of prayer can NEVER be separated from the mystery of the Cross.** To grow in prayer we must die to self and make a gift of self to others through a life of daily Christian charity. See the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy in this regard, especially during this special Jubilee year of Divine Mercy. And to examine daily if we are praying in a selfish or self-giving way.

- 3. Finally we need to understand that all prayers are answered by God but sometimes not in the way we want.** God is looking out for our eternal well-being; while we often are only looking at the here and now. The most perfect example of this dynamic is when we pray for a miracle for someone who has a life threatening illness. Sometimes a person is healed after much prayer as well as getting the necessary medical treatments, e.g., my mom, but sometimes the person is not, e.g. my dad. What is that all about? Does it mean God doesn't care or we lack necessary faith when a person is not healed? No not at all. The Church and the saints tell us that God will only work a physical miracle if He sees that it will help the afflicted person and the people around him or her to grow in holiness on a spiritual level. If He sees on the other hand that the person embracing the physical illness in loving union with Jesus on the Cross will do them more spiritual good, then He won't heal them physically, but will give them the necessary grace to embrace the sickness in love – the purpose of the Sacrament of the sick. Remember too that the greatest miracles of God are often hidden: moral and spiritual conversions from a life of serious sin to a life of devotion, humility, charity and deep friendship with God. The bottom line is: PRAY, PRAY AND PRAY some more, and always remember to offer all your sufferings in union with Christ for the good of your soul and the souls of others. If we persevere in prayer and daily embrace our Cross instead of constantly complaining about it, it will be our path to holiness. God bless you.

Recommended reading: “*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*: section 4 on prayer.” & Fr. Edward Leen’s book “*Why the Cross?*”- see www.amazon.com.