

Homily for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sometimes we may wonder to ourselves: “Why don’t my prayers seem to get answered?” Well, as the little plaque outside my office door reminds me: “When God does answer my prayer, sometimes He says “Yes,” sometimes He says “No,” and sometimes He says “you’ve got to be kidding!” Ain’t that the truth!

Daily prayer is absolutely essential to our lives of faith. If we really want to have the faith that can move mountains, even if it’s only the size of a mustard seed, than we need prayer to nourish that faith, so it can grow up to be big and strong. But, by prayer, I don’t mean just rattling off a few memorized prayers or quick reading something out of a book. I mean a deep meaningful conversation with God. If I were to just stand up here without preparing a homily and just rambling on without looking at you, you might wonder if I really cared. Well, similarly with God, if we do not engage our mind and put our heart into our prayer, then the words we say are not really communication with God, they are just words flung up hoping that God catches them!

So, what does your daily prayer life look like? That's just a question, not a judgment. And if you say you can't find any time for God, well than God just doesn't want you to be that busy! There are various ways to develop a prayer life. Certainly reading the devotional we provide here at the church, *The Word Among Us*, or another like it, and reflecting on its content is a great start. Thanking God for all those things we're grateful for – family, a job, our house, love, second chances – that's a great step too. Even opening up our Bible, maybe to the Gospel of Matthew or some random page, for example, and just slowly reading a chapter a day, is a great practice. Me? The biggest part of my prayer life is just talking and listening to God. I sit before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament – the consecrated host present in the tabernacle – and I just talk to Him – from the heart. Talk about having a personal relationship with God! It's OK to talk to God like you love Him and like He loves you! Because He does! And then, I just sit in silence and listen. Not filling the silence with thoughts (which sometimes try to intrude) or words or anything else – just waiting on God and sitting before my Beloved.

Prayer nourishes and energizes our faith so that we can be who God created us to be. But prayer is not the be all and end all of our lives as disciples of Jesus – it's really just the beginning – because prayer obtains for us the grace that we need so that we can live according to God's will. So, in other words, prayer is often meant to lead us into action – to do something about what we've been praying about. After all, aren't we the Body of Christ? Aren't we His hands and feet and mind and heart?

So, sometimes if we wonder why don't my prayers seem to get answered, maybe that's because God wants us to do something first – to take a step forward in faith! And I think our first reading today from Isaiah makes the connection between prayer and action amply evident. We hear: “Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own...**Then** you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!...**if** you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.”

So, in other words, we can pray for God to feed the hungry, but He's probably going to want to use our hands and our wallets and our cans of food to feed them! (P.S. thank you for your donations to the Souper Bowl to benefit our local food pantry). Prayer is about letting God mold us and shape us into the people He's created us to be. So, if we intentionally seek to do His will by what we do, what we say, and how we live, then when we pray to Him, we've already put His words into action. We've sought to live according to His will, and not our own. And then we'll be more likely to ask for what God wants and not what we want so much. And then prayers get answered in God's timing and in God's ways.

My friends, by matching what we believe and pray for with what we say and do, we are giving witness to the world. We are truly becoming the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We don't try to blend in with the world, so that we end up like salt losing its taste. And we don't try to hide our faith under a bushel basket. No, we are meant to boldly live lives of faith in our plain old, ordinary, everyday circumstances. And the only way we can do this is by really cultivating a prayer life. There is no way I could do what I do, and hopefully have a real effect in people's lives, without prayer. It's through prayer that God gives me what I do not have on my own. Remember, God does not call the able, He enables the called! And my brothers and sisters, God is calling us. God bless you.