

DON'T EVER STOP PRAYING: 17TH SUNDAY C

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Once when I was celebrating Mass with a Year 2 class, one little boy said that when he prays he asks God for lots of toys. I gently asked him: *'Do you really need so many toys, or do you just want lots of toys?'* He had to admit that he wants them more than he needs them.

At the Eucharist every Sunday we pray different kinds of prayer. We praise God; we thank God; we say sorry to God for doing wrong; and we ask God for what we need. We pray these kinds of prayers at other times as well - at work, at home, on the tram, train or bus, in the car - wherever. All these different kinds of prayer say two things that are very real: - 1. We are very needy people; and 2. We look to the power and love of God to give us what we truly need.

In his message to us today Jesus teaches us to ask for what we need, to seek for what we want, and to knock on the door of the heart of God with unwavering trust. Jesus assures us that we will receive what we request, that we will find what we are looking for, and that God will open the door to us. In other words, God is always willing to give us what we truly need. But for this to happen we have to tell God that we are not self-sufficient, that we need God's power and goodness to keep giving us the gifts and blessings we need.

In the prayer Jesus has been teaching us today - *'the Lord's Prayer'* - we mention our needs, including our need to first give honour and praise to God for his greatness and goodness. But in both the story of Abraham and the story of the man in the gospel, prayer is prayed for the wellbeing of others. Abraham asks for mercy for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The man in the gospel asks for three loaves of bread for his friend. So we are meant to pray for others in need and not just for ourselves.

That's why we have so many prayers for others at Mass. We go well and truly beyond just saying to God, *'look at me, look at me, gimme this, gimme that, please God, gimme'*. So we pray with warm, loving and generous hearts for others, both people we know and people we don't.

Both stories tell us too to persevere in prayer, to keep on praying, and never give up. Neither Abraham nor the man in the gospel was put off by not getting what they needed right away. But we don't continue to pray in order to change God's mind. We keep on praying to gradually find out what God is thinking and wanting for our wellbeing. Abraham found out that for just ten good people God was willing to spare the whole city from destruction. The man in the gospel story found out that the one he was bothering for the loaves of bread was a real friend after all. Perseverance in prayer shows us too the lengths to which we must go for the sake of others.

It's true that our prayer may not always change the situations for which we pray. On the other hand, it's true that when we keep praying for what is bothering and troubling us we

ourselves often change for the better. We may come to recognise, e.g. that our lives and the people in our lives are all in the hands of God, that neither we nor they are the final masters of our destinies nor the captains of our souls.

Surely, then, we may leave our concerns, worries and troubles with God, trusting that God cares, and that at least in the long run everything will work out for the best. It's important too to remember that God listens sympathetically to every single prayer we make to him.

Sometimes, however, God's answer has to be 'no'. After all you and I don't see the big picture. If we did, we would surely back off from anything like trying to manipulate God or bludgeon God into submission, and stop feeling discouraged when we don't get exactly what we want.

Pray, keep praying, pray over and over again, and don't stop praying! That's God's simple but life-giving message in our Readings today. After all God is good and kind and on our side. So in prayer, let's expect the unexpected from our '*God of surprises*'! And let's always pray with trust in our hearts that God never stops loving us, no matter what, and that God wants only the best, the very best, for us!

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