



## “LORD... I WONDER IF YOU COULD DO ME A FAVOR”

A few years ago, I just had to satisfy my curiosity and see if my prayers were really answered. In the back of my prayer journal, I created a list of special intentions that I prayed for every day. After about a year, I was able to check off all the intentions on my list and note some very significant answers. I began to call this list “God’s Glory Story.” While I must admit that not all the answers were exactly what I wanted, in retrospect, they were clearly answers that had worked for the good; *“All things work for the good for those who love God and are called according to his plan”* (Rm.8:28).

Prayers for particular needs are known as “Petitions” and “Intercessions.” These are voiced at Mass during the “Prayer of the Faithful” or they may be included in our personal prayer as noted in the Lord’s Prayer, *“give us this day our daily bread.”* **Petitions** are prayer requests to God asking for specific and particular things. **Intercessions** are like petitions but on behalf of another person. In both of these types of prayer, it is important to have a desire and docility for being in conformity with God’s will and plan. Jesus Himself was held to this standard when praying. *“I can only do what I see the Father doing”*, (Jn. 5:19). A well known example is His words in the garden of Gethsemane, *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me...”* (Lk. 22:42). Later in the New Testament, cautioning his community about misdirected petitions, Saint James told his readers, *“You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions”* (Js.4:3).

When praying petitions and intercessions, it is important to be honest and straight forward with God. Remember, he knows us and sees right through us. *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;”* (Jer. 1:5). But if God knows me so well, why do I have to ask Him for things? We ask because though God knows everything about us, in love he does not use that knowledge to dominate us. He chooses to respect our free will and waits for us to ask. Our asking is also a share in a relationship with him; that is to say, He does not impose answers on us, rather, we let him know how we feel and He responds in love.

Asking is also good for us. It is good to “vent” and really tell someone how we feel. While we have needs we would like Him to care for, there is also a more basic need at the core of our being—the need to feel important enough to be heard and cared for. Therefore, God waits for us to ask so he can wait on us.

If God really hears and responds to our petitions and intercessions, does that mean we can change His mind? Wow! That is a great question. Perhaps this is a subject for a future article on prayer. But, in the mean time, there are a number of examples in the Old Testament where people intercede to change God’s mind. In the Book of Genesis, God listens to Abraham intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah, (Gen. 18). On many occasions, Moses literally stands in the gap for the people of Israel and convinces God not to smite the whole lot of them! (Ex.32,)

In the New Testament Jesus also exemplifies God’s ability to not only change His mind, but even to respond very compassionately to people’s petitions. Of course one of the best examples of this is found in the Gospel of John when Mary asks Jesus to do something about the wine supply at the Wedding of Cana. Jesus’ first response is, *“Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come”* (Jn. 2:4). Finally, because of her persistence, Jesus complies and turns water into wine. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus refuses a “Syrophenician woman’s” plea for the healing of her daughter. Her persistence finally moves Jesus to literally change his mind and heal the girl, (Mk. 7:26-30).

In more modern times, the visionaries of Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje, have testified that Mary has held back God’s hand of chastisement on many occasions. This was due to the fervent praying of the Rosary, and of course the influence of Mary in aiding our intercessory prayer.

A key to petition and intercession is persistence. *“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (Lk 11:9-13). Though a person is very persistent in prayer, the answer is not always “yes” or “no.”

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*While there have been thousands of books written on the subject of prayer there are some basic principles will spark your prayer life. Much of my material will be rooted in a wonderful book that is no longer published, Appointment With God, Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R (Franciscan University Press). It is one of the best books I have seen for outlining and forming a life of prayer. If you can find a copy via the internet it will make a great resource for your spiritual life of prayer.*

....Fr. Moe