17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle C, 7.28,19

DOES GOD NEED OUR PRAYERS? MAYBE NOT, BUT HE ENJOYS THEM!

Like Abraham in search of fifty innocent people so that God would spare his wrath, I went in search this week of a few people in the parish to seek their wisdom. Since the gospel turns our thoughts to how a disciple ought to pray, I thought I’d ask some of them how they pray... when it’s easiest or most difficult to pray... and what the Lord’s Prayer means to them.

Not surprisingly, I received some very inspiring email responses to my request. I’d like to share some of them with you. It may confirm your understanding and practice of prayer and perhaps give you some ideas and encouragement for your own prayer life. One of your fellow parishioners whose faith is very expansive and inclusive said this:

The Lord’s Prayer is the only prayer I need. Its beauty is that it can be said in comfort and belief by any believer -- Jew, Muslim or anyone who believes in a loving God. The most powerful part of it is where it says our task is to help establish God’s kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven,” which reinforces the idea that we are called to live in that kingdom in the here and now.

There is something universal about the Lord’s Prayer. It acknowledges the goodness and love of God who is not distant, but intimate with us, as close to us as a loving parent – Abba. While it places us in the posture of children addressing their father, it also respects us as adults, inviting us into God’s divine work of forgiveness, reconciliation and the building up of God’s Kingdom. It expresses our hope and trust in God’s providence and we leave the prayer gaining a sense of confidence as disciples.

This confidence was re-echoed by another one of your fellow parishioners, a gentleman who wrote:

Prayer gives me a sense of comfort and assurance that there is someone to whom we can always turn in times of need or times of joy. The best time for me to pray is early in the morning, before I get up, waiting for the alarm to go off. Also, a little meditation in the morning after breakfast is a calming time for me at the start of the day. The Lord’s prayer to me is a perfect prayer -- simple, direct, expressed by Jesus for our guidance.

Nobody is too busy, it’s just a matter of priorities

I think that for prayer to have an impact on our lives we do have to assign it a time and place in our day. Giving prayer a “time slot” in our daily planner book or google calendar makes it a priority in our lives, like meals and sleep, exercise and work.
At the same time, this man's wife offered a testimony to the spontaneity and freedom that should accompany prayer. She said of her prayer life:

*Prayer is my conversation with God – it can be with or without words, prepared or free flowing, through which I offer, with varying degrees of success, my faith and trust and thankfulness to God for His ongoing love, grace and guidance for me and for all His creation. For me prayer is an ongoing process that ebbs and flows, is easier or more difficult, as I am able to let go and allow God to work in my life, or not. I have learned that prayer is my greatest help and hope for transforming my spirit to conform to God’s will. I love the Lord’s Prayer and use it always, as from childhood. Sr. Laurel’s class on the Lord’s Prayer was very helpful in revealing a larger purpose as Jesus hopes to transform his disciples and me to more adult faith.*

I asked another person who attends our liturgies often and has been a friend for over twenty-five years about her prayer life. I especially wanted to hear her response because I know of her deep involvement with family and friends, community organizations and with the poor, especially young women in difficulty. She said:

*I usually start my day with "Good morning, God/Goddess". I often use a little monthly booklet called *Give Us This Day* for morning prayer and the scripture readings of the day and reflection. But sometimes I just sit in the presence of the Divine and bask in the love I feel and the gratitude for life and the many blessings I have been given. In the morning I often think of the day ahead of me and ask for help in seeing God in all people I will meet, especially if I will be in challenging situations, like having to meet with someone who’s disagreeable. I pray often during the day -- for help finding my keys and a “thank you, God” when I do find them, or a random prayer for a stranger I see crossing the street, or just praising God because life is good. She wisely combines a casual interaction with God who is daily by her side along with a regimen of prayer that includes formal morning and evening prayer as well as scripture reading.*

Finally, one of our poetic parishioners describes her experience, succinctly and beautifully:

*Prayer is my lifeline to God.  
It comforts in times of need or grief.  
It settles many human scores.  
It is the “reminder” to be grateful, thankful, when I am feeling too full of myself.  
It’s my call to those loved ones who have died but whose counsel I still need.  
It’s my challenge to forgive, when it’s so hard to do.  
Prayer is my ultimate peace.*

So what does God do with all our prayers – all day, every day? There’s a delightful Hasidic story about Mendel the Tailor, who goes to his rabbi with a problem. He tells the rabbi, “I try to be the best tailor I can be. If a customer says to
me, ‘Mendel, you’re a wonderful tailor; you’re the best,’ that makes me feel good. But if somebody came into my shop every day and told me, ‘Mendel, you’re a wonderful tailor,’ or if a hundred people crowded into my shop to tell me that, it would drive me crazy. I wouldn’t be able to get any work done. So my question is, does God really need to have every Jew in the world tell Him three times a day how wonderful He is? Doesn’t God sometimes find it tedious?”

The rabbi answers him, “Mendel, that’s a really good question. You have no idea how tedious it is for God to hear our praises all day, every day. But God understands how important it is for us to remind ourselves of all He has done for us, so in His infinite kindness, He puts up with our incessant praying and accepts our praise."

God doesn’t need our prayers or praise – but we need to offer them. Prayer isn’t simply a formula of words or a choreography of ritual. Prayer is the awareness of God as the source of all that is good and the ultimate fulfillment of our life’s journey. Authentic prayer enables us to realize God’s love in our love for family and friends and their love for us; to see God’s hand nurturing and sustaining every molecule of creation; to feel God’s life-giving breath animating every moment of our existence, to feel the divine pulse within us urging us to heal our hurting world. And, in joining others in prayer, we find support and comfort in knowing that we are not alone in our search for God, that we travel the road to God’s dwelling in the company of struggling but compassionate souls like ourselves. As the rabbi explains to Mendel the Tailor –

*the prayers we offer are themselves the gift of our loving God.*

*So, unwrap God’s gift of prayer every day ... and enjoy it.*

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