

October 4, 2020 Don't Worry Homily: "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God." (Phil. 4:6)

I suspect that many of you are all too familiar with the expression, "You haven't got a prayer". These words of pessimism are usually spoken by a skeptic, one with little or no faith. If you say that someone hasn't a prayer, you mean that it is impossible for him to succeed in what he is trying to do. In other words, he has "a snowball's chance in hell" of success. Such a view makes prayer a useless exercise in futility.

The origin of the phrase is worth noting. It comes from an old tradition still in place at Westminster Palace. Members of parliament must arrive early in the morning in order to reserve a seat for legislative sessions scheduled for later in the day. The name is written on a little note that is placed on the back of the seat. Without the seat of preference, the elected official has not a chance for a decent seat once the session begins. "He hasn't got a prayer".

Why bother praying at all?

In today's epistle, Saint Paul writes to the early Christian community at Philippi. In view of their commitment to Christ, they are unsurprisingly beset with worry and restlessness. Paul advises his flock to turn to the Lord in Prayer. He stresses that they can turn everything over to God. The promised reward will be peace, a peace that the world cannot give. Constant dialogue with God is a good way to prevent anything robbing us of peace of soul.

The drastic decline in the number of churchgoers these past several months are likely attributed to the Corona-virus pandemic. Many of our fellow Christians live in fear of the virus, which, if contracted, may result in death. Saint Paul exhorts his brothers and sisters in the faith not to fear anything, nothing at all. Saint Paul implores his fellow Christians to make their requests known to God. (Phil. 4:6)

A story: Some forty years ago, my brother and a few of his friends were on their way to Hartford, Connecticut to see the British recording star, David Bowie, perform in concert. On a whim, my brother called in to a local disc jockey he had known and requested that he play a Bowie song. The disc jockey was most gracious. Not only did he play one of the artist's songs, but also acknowledged my brother as a friend to his listening audience. To have your call accepted by a disc jockey and then to have a song of your choice played on the radio is rare indeed. Not all requests are honored.

Such is not the case with God. He honors all our requests; he answers all our prayers.

One of the outstanding French Catholics of the early twentieth century was Leon Bloy, a distinguished author and a man of faith. One day he received two visitors who were deeply troubled in spirit, Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa. The couple despaired of life and informed Bloy of their intention to commit suicide if they failed to find a reason for living. They were both atheists. Bloy advised them to pray. They protested. "But we don't believe in god. What you propose is absurd." Bloy was adamant. "Well, you have asked me for my advice. Once again, I urge you to pray".

They listened and obeyed. Not long after their conversion, they were baptized in the Catholic faith. The two became luminaries of the Catholic Church in France. Maritain's influence was evident at the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960's. He was one of the great Catholic philosophers of his era.

In this age of anxiety, we must turn our life over to the crucified and risen Christ. Prayer is a solemn duty.

Do we offer a prayer before meals? Do we make an examination of conscience before we retire for the evening? Is our first act of the new day to offer a prayer of praise and thanksgiving?

Saint Paul makes a request of his brothers and sisters in Philippi that they imitate his example. "Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me." And what will be their reward? "The God of peace will be with you."

Amen!