

I hope that it does not come as any surprise to hear a priest say, "I believe in prayer." It's sort of my job, isn't it? We expect this from a religious. But, belief in prayer is not as simple as it sounds.

Personally, praying is constantly a challenge for me. Yes, you've heard it right. Belief in prayer is not easy and more so in these days of COVID-19 and its resurgence and now the powerful hurricane Douglas approaching the islands threatening to take lives, destroy homes and businesses.

Many, if not all of us, here at church and at home, have prayed for the return of the normalcy of life, as we know it. Deep inside, many of us want to believe that prayer makes a difference. If we need something - if we are confused about something - if we need guidance or direction, we have been taught to pray about it. In fact, most of us have heard well-meaning friends ask us, "Have you prayed about it?"

We all know we need to take time to talk with God but it is not that easy, is it? Some of us may have asked God to ease a heavy burden in a friend's life, or take care of a serious issue in our life. Others of us may have prayed for a return to work or, maybe a relief from financial burden, or for a better situation. We prayed repeatedly about it, but our prayers did not seem to work and are falling on deaf ears.

"Ask something of me and I will give it to you."

God comes to Solomon and instructs him to ask God for something, as if he's saying, **"I'll grant you as you wish."**

Oh, if it were that simple. If only God would give us the same opportunity that he gave Solomon as described in today's First Reading

"I do as you requested."

I wonder how long it took Solomon to give his answer - a second, a minute, an hour? Did he have to wrestle with the question, or had the answer come to him easily, quickly, effortlessly?

"Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong."

Imagine that! Solomon could have asked for anything and he chose to ask for a heart that understood right from wrong. Simply put, Solomon chose something deep within, "an understanding heart" and not something trivial, or selfish, not wealth, or power or fame. He wants to be a good leader of his

people and he knows that will only be possible if he has what it takes on the inside.

Of course, in the story, God praises Solomon's selfless request and grants it wholeheartedly. And we know what happens next. Solomon goes down as one of the wisest people in history.

Maybe the story of Solomon can help us. You see, Solomon asked for something internal, for something to be granted within him. He didn't just name something outside of himself that he wanted "fixed", but rather asked for a change within himself, a change for the better, a change that would reflect more perfectly his and our God, a God who we trust and believe is perfect in all things. Solomon wanted to be to be a "better" man. And God did not hesitate.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

God knows that what is inside us is what trumps all else, is what ultimately matters. The new life won for us in Christ is first and foremost a new life within each of us, a new life manifest at the deepest level of our being. God didn't become one of us and die for us so that things outside of us could simply be different. He died so that every person could be different on the inside - changed, transformed, full of life - that is, more like God.

And so, ask God for things that are within and help change us on the inside, as Solomon did. God will not hesitate to give us the grace we need to be changed for the better. Moreover, seek things that are of the deepest, most value in life, kindness, mercy, love, patience, generosity, all those divine things that can help make us the beautiful men and women God created us to be.

May God, the source of all that is beauty and good within us, shape our hearts and minds and thoughts and transform WITHIN us to be more like God, loving and forgiving to one another. And that makes all the difference.

"At night," someone has said, "I bring all my troubles to God; God does not sleep anyway."

So, do not hesitate to bring any worries to God; God will give us what we need most and answer prayers that can change us for the better. Amen.

Fr. Khanh