

HOMILY for 17th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Readings talk about prayer. As I reflect on that topic, I'm reminded of this favorite cute story of mine that I'd like to share with you.

It was bedtime for Timmy & Jimmy who were staying overnight with their grandparents. While kneeling to say his night prayers, Jimmy began praying at the top of his lungs, "Dear God, for Christmas I want some video games, a motor bike, a drone, and a Segway hover-board..."

"Whoa," Timmy hollered, "Why are you yelling? God ain't deaf, you know?"

"I know God's not deaf," replied Jimmy. "But, Grandma is!"

Anyway, I'm sure we've done some praying before. Most of us pray to ask God for something – either for ourselves or for someone else. In today's First Reading, we've learned how Abraham was able to use prayer to intercede for the innocent people in Sodom. Here's how he did it. The Lord said: "The outcry against Sodom & Gomorrah is so great, & their sin is so grave that I must go down & see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me." Then, Abraham drew nearer to God & said: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty, so that the innocent & the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of the world act with justice?" The Lord replied, "If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Unfortunately, Abraham could not find fifty innocent people in the whole sinful city of Sodom. He asked God to let him reduce that number down to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, & ten. But, he could not even find ten innocent people in Sodom. As the result of that, the Lord had to punish the whole sinful city by sending down fire and brimstones on it. So, apparently Abraham used prayer to intercede for the innocent people in the sinful city of Sodom & ask God to spare them from God's punishment. Abraham must have a caring & compassionate heart to pay attention to the innocent people & use prayer to bargain with God for them. He could have condemned them along with the whole sinful city & let God punish them all. But, he did not do that. We can learn something from him & practice his intercessory prayer in our daily life.

We live in a time that people yell & scream at one another over all sorts of political & social issues. They don't listen to God & one another anymore. They don't use prayer to extend God's love & mercy to the world. Instead, they use prayer to judge & condemn the world over all kinds of issues. Perhaps, we can imitate Abraham & learn to bring peace & reconciliation to our world. We need to stop stirring up more troubles to our world & pouring more gasoline on its burning political & social issues. We need more people like Abraham to intercede for our troubled world & bring God's love & peace to it. Can you imagine how our world would be like if it has lots of caring & compassionate intercessors like Abraham? One thing for sure, there will be less fighting & bickering. I don't know about you, but that's the world that I want to be a part of.

If the First Reading for this Sunday teaches us what to use prayer for, the Gospel tells us how to make our prayers more effectively. First & foremost, we need to pray for the Kingdom of God to be realized by our world & to come true. When that happens, it'll bring peace & happiness to our lives. Next, we can pray for our daily bread & basic necessities. Then, we can

ask God to forgive our sins as we've tried to forgive all who have wronged us. Finally, we may ask God to keep all the trials & sufferings from us. Those are the basic ways for us to do our prayers every day.

However, Jesus knows that it takes patience & persistence for our prayers to be answered. We can't expect our prayers to be granted right away. Sometimes, it takes weeks & months for our prayers to come true. Other times, our prayers might not be answered at all. That's why Jesus used the analogy of a friend who comes in the middle of the night asking for some bread & compared it with our prayer. We might feel rejected with our prayer. God might not grant our prayer as we wish. That rejection might feel like this, "Leave me alone. The door is shut now & my children & I are in bed. I can't get up to look after your needs."

But, Jesus doesn't want us to give up on our prayer that easy & stop asking God for help if our prayer is not answered. He gives us this encouragement, "I tell you, even though he [the friend] does not get up & take care of the man because of friendship, he will find himself doing so because of his persistence & give him as much as he needs." So, Jesus wants us to be patient & persistent in praying. If our prayer does not get answered the first time, we got to keep on praying until our request is answered. Jesus also wants us to remember this about praying, "Ask & you shall receive; seek & you shall find; knock & it shall be opened to you." In other words, Jesus encourages us to ask God, seek from God, & knock on the Gate of Heaven for our prayer. He assures us that we'll receive answer for our prayer, find what we seek, & see the Gate of Heaven open for us if we knock on it enough times.

My dear brothers & sisters, we always need help from God for the challenges in our daily life. That's why we pray & call on God to give us a hand when we can't figure out what we need to do. But, our prayers do not always get answered or turn out the way we'd like. Today, Jesus encourages us to keep on praying & be patient & persistent about it. For He wants to reassure us, "Ask & you shall receive; seek & you shall find; knock & it shall be opened to you."