

HOMILY for 17th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about prayer. Reflecting on it, 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 segway hoverboard, a remote-control helicopter,..."

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

"I know God ain't deaf," replied Jimmy. "But, grandma is!"

Sometimes, it seems like God does not hear our prayer; hence we got to yell out louder for God to acknowledge & answer them.

Anyway, several weeks ago, we had a scholar of the law come to Jesus & inquire Him on how to inherit the eternal life. This Sunday we are told that one of Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples." Like the inquiry on how to possess the eternal life, this is the first time I have ever heard that someone actually wanted to learn how to pray in the Bible. People did pray in the Bible, but usually learned it from somewhere. Jesus' disciples today asked Him to teach them to pray either because they saw John showed it to his disciples or because they realized the enormous benefits of having a good prayer life. Either way this Gospel passage was the first time Jesus showed His disciples the most important prayer in the entire Bible that future Christians would be able to use it frequently in their prayer life. We now call it the Our Father Prayer.

Evidently Jesus & John's disciples wanted to learn how to pray. We learn that a lot of people in the Bible & throughout our human history have prayed, usually when they wanted God to do something for them. Otherwise, people usually do not pray, especially when time is good. Nothing has changed since because people nowadays generally pray or come to church if they need God for something. However, Jesus gives His disciples a few other reasons to pray for in the Our Father Prayer.

First, He tells them to give praise & glory to God the Father for all the wonderful things He has done in Creation & in their lives. That way everyone would give God the Father proper respect & love. Hence, they would build a strong relationship with God. Then, they should pray for God's Kingdom to become a reality & God's will to be done instead of working hard to expand this current world along with its corrupted human freewill. If we do that, all the corrupted & evil things happening now would soon come to an end. Next, we could ask God for our daily necessities, nothing more & nothing less. We should not follow the example of the rich & the powerful by being greedy & asking for more wealth & power. That is why our current world continues to be in turmoil & conflicts. Finally, we ask God to forgive our sins & deliver us from all the painful trials as we promise to forgive all the wrongs people have done for us. Ironically, many Christian politicians these days have carried out the dirty politic of retribution & vengeance while their Christian supporters have allowed it to happen. These bogus Christians dare to claim their association with Jesus while living a way of life that is contrary to Jesus' teaching of forgiveness & reconciliation. All in all, Jesus would want us to have a good relationship with God by maintaining a good prayer life. That should be the main reason for us to pray everyday & come to church often. Otherwise, we would only pray or come to church when we need God to do something for us.

However, today's First Reading gives us one more reason to pray for. That is, we come to the Lord & ask Him for help on behalf of someone else, namely, Intercessory Prayer. Apparently the Lord wanted to carry out His punishment on the sinful city of Sodom. Thankfully the holy, prayerful man Abraham was able to intercede for it & negotiate with the Lord for mercy & forgiveness. He 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 with it?" My friends, we need lots of holy, prayerful people like Abraham in our world to come to the Lord in prayer & intercede for it daily. Otherwise, it could not stand a chance to be spared from God's wrath & punishments for all the sinful things happening in our world these days.

I'm thankful for everything my family has given me, including raising me & taking care of me. But, one thing I'm forever grateful to them is to help me build up a good prayer life. Since childhood, I have kept up a good relationship with God through my prayers & church attendance. My prayer life has helped me survive the Viet Nam War & endure all the sufferings under the Communist government. When I decided to escape from that horrible system, I was caught & imprisoned a few times. While sitting in the Communist prison, a good prayer life gave me peace & courage to survive those dark days. When I finally succeeded & made it to a refugee camp, a good prayer life kept me hopeful & connected to my far-away family & friends. Of course, it has given me encouragement during my early, challenging days of living in the United States of America. It has also kept me faithful & motivated in my years of priesthood training & service to the Church. I do not know where I might have ended up without a good prayer life.

You could give your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, & friends all sorts of things that they might like. How about giving them the gift of a good prayer life? You could teach your family & friends all kinds of wonderful skills & life lessons. How about teaching them to keep up a good prayer life? You might not be there to hold their hands in tough times or help them discern the right choices & make good decisions in the future. But, a good prayer life would help them stay connected to God & let God guide them throughout their lives. Your family & friends will appreciate that precious gift of yours once they have been through life. When our world claims that it has mental health problems, it basically tells us that no one has ever taught it how to keep up a good spiritual life & stay connected to its Creator through a good prayer life. For that is how it could renew & refresh its spirit & stay strong.

My dear brothers & sisters, each religion has its own special characteristics. Some ask their followers to do lots of good deeds & practice acts of charity regularly. Others require their members to evangelize & talk to others about their faith everyday like the Jehovah Witness. But, one thing all religions have in common is that they all pray. Catholics even encourage its members to mediate & go on retreats to increase their prayer life & strengthen their spirit. As I explained above, a good prayer life is so vital to a joyful-&-fulfilled life. I believe that if our world has a good prayer life, its current problem with mental health would eventually disappear. A good prayer life would bring it lots of blessings & help it build a strong relationship with God that would last for a lifetime. So, please give your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, & friends the gift of a good prayer life & hence keep your legacy alive.