

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, July 24, 2022
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle C

Carveth Mitchell, in his book, *The Sign in the Subway*, talks about the large printed sign he saw one day that said: "God Answers Prayer." Somebody else wrote, underneath the printed letters, these words: "Sometimes the answer is NO!"

This is what we have to deal with in any discussion of prayer. I have heard people talk about their experiences of disappointment in prayer. Someone said to his pastor, "I felt the need of God. I prayed for something to happen, and it didn't. Prayer failed." "No, Sir," the pastor said, "I think that you did not want God...You wanted God to do something for you, and that's different." "You have missed the purpose of prayer: to be in harmony with God...to have a sense of God's presence...to feel the assurance that God is in, around, and greater than any circumstance, that, come what may, we belong to him and underneath are his loving arms."

Prayer is not magic. We cannot expect to receive whatever we want from God just because we ask. There are many people who feel that they can change God's mind by their prayers. They think they can twist God's arm and get what they want. They hassle and haggle and bargain with the Lord. "Lord, do this for me...I promise to say more prayers...I will be more kind....I will be more generous..." "Lord, I will do what you want if you will do what I ask."

If we have to be honest, this is what comes out in most of our prayer. More often than not, when we pray, we think we are in business with God. Being very human we bargain only when we are in need. Once the need is satisfied, God is somehow put on hold at least until the next time. We are to be people of prayer not only when we are in need but at all times. It is not that God needs our prayers. It is us who need to pray.

Today's gospel reading presents Jesus as praying. It is in this context of his praying that the disciples ask him to teach them to do the same. In response to their

request “teach us to pray,” Jesus does not just give them the words they can use – though he teaches them the Lord’s Prayer. Beyond words, though, he teaches his disciples what prayer truly is: seeking God’s presence and what God wants for us. And perhaps this is the most difficult thing about prayer. Many of the things we ask in prayer, especially those that are based on our needs, are certainly legitimate. But prayer or praying must not be confined to asking. Instead of always praying for and fulfilling our own shortsighted needs, we must dwell more on discerning God’s will for us.

Authentic prayer leads us to know God’s will for us, to receive the Holy Spirit that empowers us to do God’s will and to open us in new ways to God’s goodness. Authentic prayer draws us out of ourselves towards the God who wishes all good for us and gives us all we need to grow in our relationship with God and with one another.

Prayer is not designed to change God’s mind, or to tell God what he already knows. God is not like some “big boss” whom we have to persuade or inform about what we need. He is, rather, from the beginning, the One who wants nothing other than to give us good things. Though these good things might not be what we immediately want or ask for. We should think of prayer as an attempt to change our minds in order to align our wills to God. (Bishop Robert Barron)

This is how we must understand the Lord’s Prayer – or the prayer Jesus himself taught us. Basically, this prayer is about ordering ourselves to God and letting his way of being order all levels of our lives.

- It is *ordering* our will in order to follow God’s will.
- It is *ordering* our desire for control and power in order to let him reign supreme.
- It is *ordering* every yearning of our hearts and every aspect of our lives in order to give glory to God.