

9th Sunday after Pentecost C (7/25/10 – *The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers – whether they are the prayers of one ... or many. *Philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition* [COL 2.8] says that if there are more people praying, God will certainly hear and heed those prayers more readily. The louder the voice, the more it will be heard. Such seems to be the thinking – though generally unspoken. Prayer chains ... prayer warriors ... national and worldwide days of prayer – wrongly can be based on the same philosophy.

Don't get me wrong. I am **not** saying that such praying is wrong ... much less that prayer **itself** is useless. Far from it! God enjoins His children to pray – often ... both privately ... and corporately. And our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the words to pray – when we know not what to pray ... and even when we do. Moreover, Scripture assures us that the Holy *Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words* [ROM 8.26].

The real point is that God's response to prayer is **not** like the decision-making of our politicians. Might does not make right. The most vocal lobby does not win the day. God is not swayed by the number of prayers – neither by their eloquence nor by their sophistication. A very young child who gives thanks for his/her food before the meal or prays for family and friends at bedtime in the most simple words receives the same gracious hearing as the aged pastor or theologian – even someone as gifted as the Psalmist David. A single prayer uttered in short, desperate gasps will receive the same loving response as the well thought out *Prayers of the Church* prayed in many congregations around the nation this morning.

That is very difficult for us to believe. The world does not often work that way. Above all, we tend to operate on some notion of merit. That is part of our fallen, sinful nature. It is another type of sinful pride. It is yet another characteristic of us sinners being curved in on ourselves. We think – at least behave – as if the world, the entire universe ... and even God Himself ... revolved around **us**. God will answer – God will **have** to answer

– our prayers if they are multiplied ... and if we are more worthy ... more intentional ... more focused in our praying.

But you see, the bottom line is that it is **not** about **us** so much as it is about **God** – and **His** nature – when it comes to prayer. It is about God’s Name ... and God’s honor. That is what the parable after Luke’s shorter version of the *Lord’s Prayer* teaches us, anyway [LK 11.5-8]. That this is the key point of the parable Jesus tells is not often caught ... let alone taught. We must **always** look at context to rightly interpret ... rightly understand.

Last week – in the verses immediately prior to the *Gospel* for today – you heard the account of Jesus at the house of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, hearing His Word. Martha was busy preparing and serving. Both activities are good. Both are important in our daily Christian lives. Jesus says that *Mary has chosen the good portion* [LK 10.42]. That was a lesson in right worship – which first and foremost consists of **hearing** the Gospel-Word of Christ and **receiving** His Gifts. Serving is important. However, serving only comes **after** receiving the Gifts – after receiving our Daily Bread ... both physical and especially spiritual – from God. The lesson on right worship is followed quickly by teaching on right prayer – the two go together. And just as right worship is not primarily concerned with what **we** do but on the **reception** of the good Gifts of **God**, so also right prayer focuses **not** on us but on **God**.

Right prayer is **not** about **me** ... what **I** want ... how “worthy” **I** am to ask ... or how persistent **I** am in my asking – but rather about the inherent **goodness** of **God** ... and the changeless truth that *The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers*. Right prayer is about the **Father** hallowing His Name – as Jesus has taught us to pray in the first petition. And God keeps His Name holy among us – at least in part – by answering the prayers of His children in love and by giving us what we truly need – without any merit or worthiness in us ... but simply because He is a loving, merciful, gracious, giving God.

We so easily get prayer wrong. In his epistle, James speaks about our

prayer problem in the context of our many other sins:

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [JAMES 4.2-4]

We get prayer wrong because we are sinful – and thus see and understand **everything** through the distorted darkness of our sinful flesh.

That makes this truth – that *The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers* – even more amazing. It is yet another blessed facet of the precious Gospel. It is simply because of God’s love for us – on account of Christ – that He hears and answers our prayers. But don’t take my word for it – consider again the Word of our Savior in today’s *Gospel* [LK 11.5-8].

A man receives a midnight visitor. The mores of hospitality in the culture demand that he set before this visitor a full meal – indeed, an abundance of food. When he determines that he is lacking, he quickly goes to his neighbor. In Jesus’ day, this was not unusual – the hospitality shown a visitor was a reflection on the entire city or village. The neighbor’s initial response might be seen as an expression of our own sinful selfishness. He knows what he ought to do – indeed, what he actually **wants** to do in keeping with his own (and the town’s) honor. But his sinful flesh finds ready excuses – it is late ... the door is locked ... my children are in bed. We know that laziness – we have it, too.

At this point, many translations – and commentators – will speak of the requestor’s *impudence* or *persistence*. The word used by our Lord basically indicates a *lack of shame*. Taken as speaking of the requestor, this could mean that the man feels no shame in persistently and rudely demanding assistance in entertaining his midnight guest. However, taken in another way, as speaking of the neighbor in bed – and the context supports this understanding – it means that this neighbor lacks shame ... that is, he is

above reproach. To say it another way: this neighbor is known for his honorable ways. This parable of Christ is **not** saying that we should simply persist in our prayers until we get what we want. Rather, with this parable our Lord teaches that we can count on God the Father to answer our prayers lovingly – in the way that is best. For God entreats us to pray to Him and to believe that He is our heavenly Father, such that we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father ... knowing that He hears us for Jesus' sake. God's Name and honor are on the line. And when *The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers*, He makes His Name holy among us.

That this is a good way to interpret and understand our text, Christ verifies in His Words that follow [LK 11.11-13]. Earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children – even though we are evil by nature because of our sinful flesh. God the Father knows even better how to give good gifts to His dearly beloved and forgiven children – whom He has reconciled to Himself and made His Own through His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Not only will *The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers* – giving us *whatever* we truly *need* – but also He will give us His Holy Spirit [11.8]. To say it another way: God will provide for our physical needs; but even more importantly, He makes us His children as the Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacrament ... making His dwelling with us and in us such that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we may be certain of His never-ending love for us.

Since you have been buried with Christ in Baptism – united to Him in His death and resurrection – you who were once dead in your trespasses have been made alive in Christ. All your sins are forgiven. The record of your debt to God has been cancelled and set aside in Christ when He lovingly allowed Himself to be nailed to the Cross [COL 2.12-14]. Because of the Son's work on our behalf, we may be certain that our loving heavenly Father will *give us each day our daily bread ... forgive us our sins ... and lead us not into temptation* [LK 11.4]. For the Son has given us these words to pray – and *The Father Lovingly Answers Our Prayers* for Jesus' sake.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]