

### *17 week in Ordinary Time, C*

The prayer of petition – asking God for help; something most of us do as naturally as breathing. But like breathing clean, fresh air, we may not appreciate it. We may not stop to realize how important it is to pray for what we need.

It may surprise you to learn that some Christians have problems with the prayer of petition. Many scholars have said that it might be better if all our prayers simply praised God. Why ask him for anything, since he already knows what we need and since he certainly wants what is best for us? Other Christians still go through the motion of asking God but don't really believe it does any good. Perhaps as children they asked God to keep a loved one from dying or their parents from getting divorce, and God did not answer their prayers. So they see no point in praying. God will do what he wants anyway.

Yet even if we are aware of these difficulties, most of us continue to pray. As we see in today's Gospel reading, Jesus never did downgrade prayers of petition. When asked to show his disciples how to pray, he filled that prayer with petitions. When he himself prayed in the Garden of Olives, his was a prayer of petition.

The two pictures Jesus gives today put some light on his attitude. The first one shows the householder who bangs on a friend's door in the middle of the night to borrow some bread. The request is based on their friendship: because the two are friends, the needful one can be so pushy

in imposing on the other. Two elements in this story throw some light on prayer. The first is the householder's admission that he is in need, not self – sufficient. The second is his act of faith in his friend. Like the householder, in prayer we admit that we are in need, that we are not self – sufficient. And like him, we have faith in God because of our friendship with him.

So Jesus teaches us to ask God in this way. We ask him not because he doesn't know what we need but because we need to admit our needfulness and to profess our faith in God's goodness. By doing this, we respond to God's offer of friendship. And once we have accepted the gift of God as our friend, then, we are ready to accept his gift.

This will answer the question of the scholars. It is not that God needs to know what we need but that we need to know that we need. It is not that God has to be persuaded to be good to us but that we need to admit that he is good.

The second story Jesus tells is more relevant to the Christian scriptures since the relationship here is built on family. The difference is this. The parent is not just willing to give the children the good things they ask for, as a friend would. Rather the parent is eager to give the children not only what they ask, but everything they need. Our heavenly Father is like this parent, but to a perfect degree – perfectly loving and possessed of every good gift.

So Jesus teaches us to ask of God in the spirit of children asking their father. We are to ask with the confidence that our all – loving and all – powerful Father will give us what we really need for our own good. This answers the doubt of those whose prayers have not been answered. The answer, quite simply is, no sincere petition, made in faith, is ever unanswered. But like the loving Father he is, God often gives us the gifts we need – the gifts which will help us, rather than the ones we ask for.

Thus the humble, taken – for – granted prayer of petition points to exciting and comforting truths. It is exciting that the Lord of all has chosen us to be his friends and even to be his children. It is comforting to know that he invites us to accept friendship and son ship by asking him for everything we need. And it is even more comforting to know that as a loving father, he will always answer our prayers by giving us what we really need the most. **Amen.**