

In Whom Is Our Faith?

Introduction

If the American Experience has taught us anything, it has taught us that “making it on our own” is the ideal. We applaud “self-made” men and women. We encourage young people to get out on their own and to make their own way in the world.

As far as they go, those are good things. But...we can come to think we don't *need* anyone else. Many of us come from families where everyone lived in the same part of a city, or the same small town; now, many of us live hundreds, or even *thousands* of miles from our families. Work is so consuming for some of us, that we haven't even had time to *meet* our neighbors beyond the ones whose yards touch ours.

This attitude bleeds over into our relationship with God, too. Now, we will still pray hard in times of adversity; I talked with God *a lot* during my eight months of unemployment recently. Most of us will turn to God when things get bad (in times of illness, danger or death).

Are those the only times we are called to pray, though? Or is God asking more of us?

Move I

Adversity shows up throughout the Bible; God *constantly* steps in to rescue His people. Moses' prayer over the Israelite army in the first reading was key to *this* rescue. The Amalekites showed up for a fight; Moses stood *expectantly* praying over the army during the battle, with the staff of God, the *same staff that parted the waters* to rescue Israel from the Egyptians, to gain the victory. And when Moses *tired* in prayer, what happened? Aaron and Hur *supported* him, *literally*, to help win the day. Moses' persistence...paid off.

In the Gospel, Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. Even bad men understand that they should do right by people who ask for something persistently. Jesus asks at the end of the parable, "Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night"? God will *always* help us when we ask Him.

Paul, in the second reading, gives Timothy two commands: to "remain faithful to what you have learned and believed", and to "be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient".

See how today's Scriptures all point toward being faithful and persistent in prayer, then?

Move II

Jesus asks an important question at the end of the Gospel: “But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” What is he talking about?

Again, the readings all point toward being persistent in prayer to the Father. And even though our culture tends to teach us that we either need to “figure it out”, or “talk it out”, that we can come up with the answers on our own, or by committee, “faith in ourselves” is *not* what Christ is talking about, and it isn’t the faith the rest of today’s Scriptures are referring to.

Jesus wants us to *pray always without becoming weary*”. The faith Jesus is asking about in the Gospel, is the faith that *leads* us to pray without becoming weary!

How are we supposed to pray, according to the Lord’s Prayer? “Our Father...hallowed be thy name...thy will be done...give us our daily bread.” “Thy will be done”. Yes, we should expect God to “secure the rights of His chosen ones”, *us*. And we should expect Him to do it in a way that will best accomplish *His* will...not necessarily *our* will.

Move III

But does prayer really “work”? There is a phenomenon we see in social media these days, when something tragic happens, like a shooting or a natural disaster. People will ask prayer for the victims of a tragedy, and the “prayer shamers” go for their throats and yell that they should get out and *do* something, not “waste time” in prayer.

Even outside social media, we can start to wonder if prayer works. I prayed I wouldn’t lose my job. I did. We pray that our loved ones won’t get sick, or if sick, that they won’t die. Sad things happen to good people all the time, *despite* prayer. Why doesn’t God give me what I want? Why do these bad things happen, even though I pray?

Brothers and sisters, the prayer we are called to is different from, “gimme, gimme, gimme everything I think I want”. God isn’t a Christmas list, or a vending machine. Remember the Lord’s Prayer: “*thy* will be done”. When we pray, we are not trying to change God, or to change His plans. We are praying that “god’s will be done, and that we can *understand* how God’s plan is best for us.

Will we *always* see how it all fits together? No. But we are called to be persistent *anyway*. We are called to seek God’s will *constantly*. And we are called to have *faith* that God will secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night”!

Conclusion

“I got this.” Famous last words of many a person trying to “do life” on their own.

If we know anything as Christians, it should be that the idea of the “self-made man or woman” is an illusion. We need the people in the community around us. We need our families; we need our neighbors.

And like the Israelites in the desert, like the people of Israel at the time of Christ, we need God’s help to make our way in the world. And our scriptures today show us the way to get that help: we *must* be persistent in prayer, even when it looks like things aren’t going our way.

What is God asking of us? Is He just asking that we talk to Him all the time? Or is He asking us to have *faith* in Him, and in His promises to us? “I lift up my eyes toward the mountains; whence shall help come to me? My help is from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” The Lord is our help. And He will *always* come through.

We only need believe Him when He promises it!