

23rd Sunday – Ordinary Time

What Do You Pray For?

Fraternal Correction

Today's Gospel urges us to intervene for another member of the faith who is breaking the moral law. It is a great act of charity to help those who have strayed from the truth in matters of faith and moral. This intervention is always to be done with prudence, kindness and most importantly love. That is the difficult part... aligning our heart not with what we think a person needs but with what God knows they need. And I think that Christ is speaking of fraternal correction in terms of something much more important... our relationship to him and to one another.

The Gospel

Further on we hear Jesus say; "if two agree about anything for which they are to pray it shall be granted" So what do you pray for?

So What do You Pray for?

I posed this question to my students. Their responses were not surprising, but I quickly realized that their prayer though sincere and heartfelt were prayers for escape.... Prayers to be saved from trial. Prayers to escape sorrow. Prayers to escape disappointment. Prayers for relief from some hurting or difficult situation

God Fix This!

This kind of prayer is doomed to lead us to disillusionment and it causes us to doubt God's goodness and presence in our lives. It damages our relationship with God. We expect him to fix it... to relieve us from suffering and the circumstances of our human condition. This kind of prayer is rooted in our own neediness. It is self-centered and it does not align our heart with God's will, but our own. Prayer must never be self-centered or selfish... that kind of prayer will never find an answer, and it will only lead us to believe that God has failed us.

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Never Escape but Victory

The focus of our prayer must begin with asking that our own needs and desires be cleansed away. It is easy to think that what we want... God wants as well. This is our first mistake! We must ask God to reveal to us his desire and his will for anything and everything we face in our life.

God's answer to prayer is never escape but victory. He does not give us an escape from our human situation. He enables us to accept what we can not understand. He enables us to endure what without him would be unendurable. He enables us to face difficulties that without him would be beyond all facing.

His Answer

How do we know this? Jesus prayed to be released from the fearful situation that confronted him. He was not released from it, but was given the power to meet it, to endure it and to conquer it. When we pray unselfishly God will send his answer. But the answer is always his answer and not necessarily ours. And Jesus promises us that where two or three of us are gathered he is there.

Cleansing Our Desires

Every one of us has a burden that we carry... something we fear or are troubled by. Every one of us has gone astray at points in our life. We all need fraternal correction, but those difficulties and interventions are most effective when we talk to God about them first. When we ask him to cleanse our desires from the things we face in life. When we do this He will help us to see what others need, and he will give us the strength to endure it with them.

We Do Not Struggle Alone

We must always remember that each of us struggles but we do not struggle alone. There is nothing that we will every face that he has not faced first. We have each other... but most importantly we have him.