



Does prayer work? This often asked question brings to mind a favorite joke of mine, that since I have been here eight years, I have probably told more than once. As a preacher I have found that people often remember the

jokes far more than the rest of the homily. Also, you and I know there are many jokes that poke fun at various nationalities. The only such jokes I would tell are about the Irish ones since that is my heritage. But I am going to tell you an American joke and it is the only one that I know. There were three men who had committed terrible crimes and the king had ordered that they be guillotined. The first man to be sent to the terrible machine was a Frenchman. He was asked if he had any last words. He said, *I am a Frenchman and had a life full of music and wine and great food. I am ready to die.* He put his head down and the switch was pulled. The blade came down and stopped one inch from the man's neck. Everyone cheered and he was allowed to go free. The next man was a Russian. He was asked if he had any last words. He responded, *I am a Russian. It was always cold and dreary in Siberia and the food was terrible: nothing but potato soup. I am ready to die.* The blade came down and stopped one inch from the man's neck. Everyone cheered and he was allowed to go free. Finally, the third man was called to the block. He was an American. He was asked if he had any last words. He stood and said, *if you fix that wire and tighten that screw...the machine will work.*

Does prayer work? I think that is not the way to address the question of prayer. In today Gospel, Jesus teaches the apostles and all generation to follow a simple perfect prayer. It is the *Our Father*. To pray is not a task, a job that is done to accomplish something. It is far more than a duty or an obligation. When we pray, whether it is the rosary, the divine mercy prayer, the Psalms, or a prayer in our own words, we are entering into three of the most important truths of life:

1. To pray is to recognize that there is a God. Let us not take that for granted since we live in a world that is growing increasingly secular and one that seeks to push God out of life. Atheism and disbelief are on the rise. I remember reading a book

about a Dutch Jewish philosopher named Etty Hillesum called *An Interrupted Life*. She is living during the darkest days of World War II and slowly is beginning to turn to God from a secular life. I read the book many years ago but there is one sentence that she repeated over and over again before she was taken in the Holocaust. *I must learn to bend the knee* which was her eloquent way of turning to God and committing to prayer.

2. The second truth of praying it that it recognizes an obvious truth that many of us may not admit to in the silence of our hearts. I am not God. I am dependent on God for every heartbeat and breath. The first sin of *The Bible* comes from Satan tempting Adam and Eve by telling them if you eat that fruit you will be like God. We are too intelligent to walk around saying we are God, but when we refuse to accept our flawed humanity and the equally flawed humanity of others , we are denying our true need for God, for salvation, for a purpose in life, and a sense of where am I going.

3. The third key aspect of praying it is bring me to the point of believing that this God hears me and loves me. I am his beloved son and daughter. Every hair of my head is counted. He has carved my name on the palm of his hand. He has so loved me that he entered fully into the world through the incarnation of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Does prayer work? If you believe that prayer is life a coke machine where you put your prayers in the machine and expect a sudden miracle, more than likely, you will be disappointed. God is not a magician but a lover of each one of us. When we love someone, the relationship is built on sharing our life and delighting in the presence of the other. I marvel at couples or friends who can just and be with each other with a minimum of word. They are happy and content to be in the presence of one another. There are many definitions of prayer. I think of the classic one I learned as child: *prayer is the lifting of the mind and heart to God*. Another one is prayer is a conversation with God that is a two way conversation. I like the idea that prayer is paying attention to God. I think we believe we are like a stranded person on the great ocean waving frantically to get the attention of passing ship or airplane flying above. Perhaps we might reverse the image: God is

the one in the boat waving at us to get our attention, seeking to be in relationship with us.

I was going to give a farewell homily but I will be giving that at the 12:00 p.m. Mass and it is a bit long. The founder of the Redemptorist, St. Alphonsus Ligouri taught his men that if you had only one talk to give at a retreat or a mission, then that talk should be on prayer. I hope over the past 33 years, the many Redemptorists who have served here have helped you to pray. All the Masses said were the most profound prayer that can be celebrated since at mass we enter into the dying and rising of Jesus and receive him into our body through the Eucharist. When you came to confession, you were telling God you are sorry, when you had your children baptism, you were passing on the gift of faith to them, a most profound act of prayer. Over these past 33 years we have done a great deal of praying together as we shared our lives and faith together. I can tell you that over my eight years, you have inspired me, loved me, and taught me by how you lived your lives and prayed to be a better Redemptorist priest.



It is hard to say goodbye, but we lift our hearts in gratitude for all we shared. Prayer does work.