

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Oct 10th 2013

In his parables on the power of persistence in prayer in the passages from Luke, Jesus helps us understand the need to continue to ask of God, to petition for help and guidance, to form good aspirations and expect good things from our prayer. These passages on one level help me understand that God will answer my requests with good gifts. But one difficult thing is that God gives us good gifts that only God might see as being good. I recall a story from deMello where the master reminds his followers that our lives are like beautiful tapestries that God weaves with our talents and gifts. We fail to see the beauty many times because we are viewing the tapestry from the reverse side, while God can see it in all its glory. So too the responses we might receive in our prayer – we fail to see their goodness because we look with mortal eyes instead from God’s perspective.

On another level, though, these passages from Luke help me see the need for my own persistence, and perhaps more importantly, my perseverance. In the first story, the visitor continues asking until he receives what he desires. In the second, those who ask, receive – if you don’t ask (if you don’t try, if you don’t pray), you don’t receive. Persistence – continuing to dialogue – God will answer, but we must initiate and ask. God is always there for us.

And what should we ask for, what should we pray for, what should we desire? One thing that we could all use, I suspect, is the strength to avoid the counsel of the wicked. I don’t suppose we actively pursue the “wicked” and seek their “counsel,” but we might ignore the good examples of those around us. We might forget that the goodness of this world, the gifts that we have received, the successes that we have, all are nothing unless we use them to serve the Lord. We might listen to those who argue we do not need to help the poor because they should help themselves, that we should not give them food because they should fish for themselves, and shelter themselves, and clothe themselves, and forget that Jesus calls us to feed and clothe and shelter, and love without judging, without expectation of recompense, without doing a calculus that tries to determine who is “worthy” of our giving.

Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, once said “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” When we take greater satisfaction in what we have than in how we serve, in what we own than in what we give, in what we want than in what we need, we are ignoring our spiritual side in favor of our human side. When we place too much stock in our abilities to provide for ourselves, and forget to be like the birds of the sky who do not fear for their future but glory in the gift of their present, we are looking through the back side of our tapestry. When we forget we are spiritual creations of a loving God, then we prevent ourselves from fully realizing our unique identity and from serving our Creator in the way we are called to do.

And so my prayer today is for clarity of vision, so I can more clearly realize my spiritual existence, more deeply discover my true self, and more gratefully act to serve my loving Creator.

Tom Purcell