

Homily For the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C

St. Peter's 5:00 PM/7:00PM/9:30 AM Masses- October 26/27, 2019

Sirach 35:15-22 "The prayer of the person whose service is pleasing to the Lord, will reach the clouds."

Psalms 34 "The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

2 Tim 4:6-8,16-18 "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith."

Luke 18:9-14 "He was beating his breast and saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

How To Get God's Attention

Introduction

You would think that Christians - that's us - would be very comfortable with the idea of prayer as a conversation with God. Good two way conversations can lead to friendships. We call that kind of friendship with God a saving relationship. Since God is the source of all life, that relationship is a kind of pouring into that life giving relationship.

We could take every single one of today's readings and make a course on prayer. All four are about how to get God's attention. They also give us plenty of ideas about how not to pray. A man was driving around desperate to find a parking spot. He was late for an appointment and on a very busy street. Having heard that one should give even the ordinary trials of the day to God in prayer, he gives it a shot. "Lord," he prays. "I can't stand this. You know I need to find a parking spot ASAP. If you open a space up for me, I swear I'll give up the extra drinking I've been doing. Not only that, I promise I'll stop missing mass and start going every Sunday." Suddenly, the clouds part and the sun shines directly on an empty parking spot. He barely has to change direction to slip right into that spot and without hesitation, says: "Never mind, Lord, I found one on my own!"

I think we mostly know that we can't manipulate God but, for some reason, that doesn't stop us from trying to do that from time to time. How many different times and in different ways does Jesus have to show us and tell us how to pray? It turns out that it's a lot of times and a lot of ways. Last week, Jesus used a widow

asking for justice as a reminder to be persistent. This week, it's about our attitude. Here is a list of some ways NOT to get God's attention in prayer.

How NOT to Get God's Attention in Prayer

1. The first is to be on God's team. That would go something like this: God, you know I'm one of the good guys. I'm progressive. I'm conservative. I'm African or I'm European. Sirach tells us that God won't be partial to any group. He goes so far as to say that even being one of the poor doesn't qualify us for special status, at least not by itself.

2. Trust in yourself, that you are already righteous, which means holy. Then remind God how awesome you are. Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. The Pharisee was praying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of all my income." The Pharisee is not being dishonest. He has done all the things he says. He is singing his own praises for his fasting, proclaimed by the prophets and tithing is required by the law.

Every time I think the Pharisees are going to get a bit of a break, Jesus just crushes their arrogance before God. Not only do the Pharisees who confront Jesus along the way look bad, but now in this passage, Jesus is even making up stories where the Pharisee wears a black hat because he thinks God has to give him the highest of honours because, well, he deserves it.

3. Don't notice your own sinfulness. Pay no attention to righteous living and behaviour. Regard others with contempt. The Pharisee is compared to a tax collector, a bad guy in everyone's eyes. With apologies to anyone who works for the Canada Revenue Agency, in those days, these guys are seen as the worst. They were traitors to their own people. Furthermore, their dealing with the pagan Romans made them ritually impure, thereby excommunicating themselves from their fellow Jews. He probably shouldn't even be in the temple. Pretty nifty of the Pharisee to make himself look even better by comparing himself to someone obviously inferior. God was probably fooled, right?

How To Get God's Attention in Prayer

So, those are some of the things which are explicit in today's readings. There are others, such as just doing the opposite of any of the things which the Scriptural writers tell us we MUST do. Here are some of those.

1. Pour out your heart when you have been wronged, the widow and orphan are the ones who are at the greatest risk. They symbolize those who are vulnerable. Elsewhere in scripture it also includes the foreigner and the one who is enslaved because of debt. The Psalmist says if you are poor call out to the Lord and he will hear you. The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

2. Fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith. Long for his appearing. Paul's martyrdom is close at hand when he writes this letter. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he would not be thrown to the lions at the Roman circus, but he was beheaded outside Rome, condemned by the Emperor Nero. After 30 years of suffering to proclaim the Gospel, he has the confidence to know that he is in the realm of God's righteousness, rather than using the prescriptions of the law as a way of humbly following God

I am already being poured out as a libation. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the Crown of righteousness: garland of victory wreath used to crown winning athletes in the ancient Olympics.

Not just the minimum requirement of 10% tithe, his offering is his whole self. Poured out as a libation: Daily drink offerings of wine were poured out at the base of the Temple altar. Paul sees martyrdom as an act of sacrifice and liturgical worship.

3. If many things are going wrong, turn to the Lord. If nothing is going wrong, acknowledge your sinfulness to him. Humble yourself and you will be exalted. Jesus The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds. Ben Sirach The person whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted, and their prayer will reach to the

clouds. The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, until the Most High responds and does justice for the righteous.

4. Learn something called *The prayer of the heart*. When I was a younger man than I am now, I read a book called *The Way of a Pilgrim*, about a young man who felt that his life was empty and he needed to know how to find meaning. In church one day, he heard the passage from St. Paul to the Thessalonians which advised the Christians there to "pray constantly" or to "pray without ceasing." This intrigued him but he could not, for the life of him, figure out what Paul could mean by that. How would it be possible to pray all the time without stopping all other activities.

The young man set out walking across Russia where he lived. Everywhere he went, when he met holy people, or those living in convents and monasteries, he would ask about their practice of prayer and what St. Paul meant. Then he learned the prayer of the heart, based on passages like the blind man by the side of the road, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

Or today's passage, the tax collector who stood by himself. He wouldn't even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus says about him that he went down to his home justified, rather than the other, for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted. This sounds a little bit like the man who went to a banquet and sat at the head table and was asked to sit way at the back. That kind of humbling is in store for this one.

The full prayer taught to that pilgrim goes like this: Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I was so inspired by the pilgrim's story that I practiced that prayer everywhere I was, gradually making a part of almost every breath. I didn't continue after that but I think it is still a part of me. Recently, some grade three children were telling me stories about times when they were afraid, like when they had nightmares. I taught them the Jesus prayer for them to use at those times.

Call To Action

We are invited to ponder whether we resemble the tax collector or the Pharisee. Are we sometimes self righteous? We need to recognize that we are probably somewhere between the Pharisee and the tax collector in our own prayer lives. Sometimes we feel the need to build ourselves up before God. The world we live in almost demands that of us. We are always trying to look our best before others.

But with God, it only indicates that we have no need of his love and mercy. We know that the tax collector's humility is preferable, of course. The hard part is seeing ourselves as sinners.

But we are also sometimes so humbled by life that we can feel the desire to lay down at the feet of Jesus everything we have and everything we are and everything we long to be, because we get those occasional glimpses that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot make ourselves righteous. We cannot deserve God's love or his mercy. We can only beat our chests and say, Lord I am sorry for my sins. I come sick before the physician of life. Do not abandon me or leave me lost in my sinfulness. Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.