

Expanding (Literally) the Heart

During the feast of Pentecost, St Phillip Neri had been fervently praying that he would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which he had been praying for everyday.

-While he was praying, St. Phillip describes that he felt a sudden inrush of the Spirit in the form of a globe of fire which descended right into his heart.

-What is truly miraculous is that this incident literally increased the heart capacity of this amazing saint such that his fourth and fifth ribs were broken because his heart increased by the size of a fist.

-Truly the Holy Spirit had descended upon him in a new way to literally expand his love for God and for souls.

Like St. Phillip Neri, the Gospel today is encouraging us to ask for the GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT so that he may INCREASE OUR DESIRES FOR GOD and NOT for the THINGS OF THIS WORLD.

This Gospel is interesting because it is not just inviting us to pray with a general persistence, but it is inviting us to pray constantly for a particular gift.

-Jesus says "Ask and **IT** will be given." What is this "**IT**" he is talking about?

-Later on he reveals what he means: "How much more will the heavenly Father give **the HOLY SPIRIT** to those who **ASK** him!"

-So it becomes clear that St. Luke is trying to tell us to pray for the Holy Spirit and not just for material things.

-How many of us would have preferred for St. Luke to say "How much more will the heavenly Father give a **brand new yacht** to those who ask him or a **Nissan GTR** or even a **new hip.**"

-St. Luke is not saying that these material things are bad in and of themselves, but he is trying to reorient our priorities so that we put first things first.

If you compare this same text in Luke with Matthew's text in chapter 7, you will find an interesting difference.

-Matthew's text says "How much more will your heavenly Father give **GOOD THINGS** to those who ask him."

-Luke is interpreting that phrase and making it more specific because some of us could misinterpret 'good things' as **MATERIAL GOODS** which are not bad in themselves but when they become the sole focus of our lives then these good things become bad things.

-Remember the parable of the rich fool who tore down his barn to build bigger ones for his grain? Notice what Jesus says, "You fool! This very night the **THINGS** you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Lk 12:20).

-Or in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham who was comforting Lazarus in heaven was speaking to the rich man in Hades: “remember that during your lifetime you received your GOOD THINGS and Lazarus EVIL THINGS” (Lk 16:24).

Notice how these GOOD THINGS actually become the cause of judgement for those who abused their material goods by putting them above God and others.

When we pray, God desires that we ask for nothing less than the Holy Spirit because he desires that we receive the very gift of his self in love.

Listen to what Pope Benedict wrote in *Spe Salvi*:

Man was created for greatness—for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched. “By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him]” (33)

May we earnestly desire his PRESENCE more than his PRESENTS, the GIVER more than his GIFTS. May we desire the gift of GOD’S SPIRIT who will STRETCH OUR HEARTS as he stretched the heart of St. Phillip Neri so that we may be READY to RECEIVE THE VERY GIFT OF GOD’S SELF in the Eucharist.