

This is for those of us of a, 'more mature persuasion,' which is just a euphemism for old! The more you weigh, the harder you are to kidnap. Stay safe. Eat more cake.

It's strange how drinking 8 glasses of water a day seems impossible. But 8 cups of coffee goes down like a chubby kid on a seesaw.

To err is human. To blame it on someone else shows management potential.

I enjoy a glass of wine each night for its health benefits. The other glasses are for my witty comebacks and flawless dance moves.

OK, enough. Jesus gives us this beautiful, simple little prayer, the Lord's Prayer. It's not long, and it presumes an intimate understanding of God as indicated by the opening words 'Our Father, Daddy.' In its brevity and simplicity, it gives us a model, and the parable and commentary which follow, tease out some of the implications of it. Now anyone, even a child, would have been able to understand Jesus, *in His time*. However, we might need some help, as our day-to-day experience is quite different. The details of the parable contained in this passage reflect very accurately the way first-century Galilean peasants lived. We need to remember that in those days, people traveled largely by foot. Because of the excessive heat, the accepted practice was to start out late in the afternoon and walk into the first part of the night. So it was not at all unusual that an unexpected guest might appear at the door – at midnight – asking for hospitality. We also need to realize that there were very few HOLIDAY INNS at the time, which is why hospitality was regarded as such a virtue. It was the only way that poor people could travel and survive.

So if a person had to make a journey, he would often plot his course carefully in order to get to Cousin Samuel's tonight and Aunt Sarah's tomorrow night. And since I-Phones had not yet been invented, and the Israeli Postal Service didn't exist, there was no way of letting them know that you were coming, unless by luck, someone else was going to the same town and could tell them to expect their relatives on a specific day. On the hosting end, it was common courtesy to give a weary traveler something to eat, no matter how late they arrived. That is precisely the context of Jesus' story.

A friend arrived in the dead of the night and the host found himself without sufficient food. Peasants in that day lived very close to the edge. There was rarely a surplus of anything. Rather than embarrass himself, however, and send his guest to bed hungry, the host excused himself, ventured next door, and asked his neighbor if he could bail him out by giving him 3 loaves – enough for an average family meal at that time. The response of the man next door was utterly typical.

Again, we need to realize that most peasant houses were one-room enclosures. Many of them did not have windows. There was usually a single door that afforded access both inside and out, a dirt floor, some kind of stove against a wall, and pegs on which people could hang things. The cooking was done outside; in fact, almost everything was done outside. The houses were basically sleeping places. After supper the father would gather up his tools and animals – chickens, sheep, dog, and cows -- and move them inside. Then he would call in his wife and children and close the door. He would bank the fire, put a bushel over the lamp to keep it from blowing out, and then they would lie down together on the dirt floor, the children closest to the stove. It would be totally dark inside.

The accepted courtesy was that you did not bother a neighbor once the closing rituals of the day had occurred. This accounts for the initial response to the neighbor's request. A voice from within responded sleepily: "Can't you see that the door is shut? Don't you know that my children are in bed?" And that was literally the case; they were all around him on the dirt floor, and it was utterly dark. "I can't get up and give you bread at this time of night. I'll step on one of the kids, one of the animals, and we'll wake up the whole neighborhood!" Which is exactly what would have happened. Those of you who are parents also know what a pain it is to try to get a child to go to sleep in the first place. It seems like my siblings, as they had their children, all observed an unwritten eleventh commandment which was: "Never wake a sleeping child!" There was no crisis severe enough to justify starting the going-to-bed ritual all over again.

The embarrassed host, however, was not willing to give up easily. He kept knocking at the door until everyone was awakened. By this time the whole inside was a sea of turmoil. The neighbor, probably saying under his breath, "Anything to get rid of that loudmouth from next door," got up, took the bushel off the lamp, went to the cupboard, fetched the loaves, and sullenly handed them over. Persistence won out over reluctance. One man went home happy while another house was left in shambles. BUT, everyone understood quite well that the man inside the house really had no choice. Since the houses were packed tight next to one another, usually in family clans, everyone in town would know the story by morning. The neighbors would have been awakened by the exchange and all the commotion, and they would all have been listening intently to see if the man helped his neighbor in need. Because to have failed to do so would have brought shame upon his household. He and his family would have been ostracized by the community. It would have been an even bigger disaster NOT to extend hospitality.

Now by using this parable, Jesus was correcting a common pagan understanding of God. The pagan understanding of god was that the gods really didn't care about human beings. Therefore, the only way to get them to give in to what we need, is to have long and persistent prayers. The thinking was that if we keep at it long enough, we finally wear God out and God says, "OK, OK, since I cannot get rid of you in any other way, I am going to give you what you are asking." It would have not been even remotely conceivable for the peasant to refuse, and persistence won out over reluctance. But the next word that connects the parable and the next section is the key. AND.

Jesus then sets an utterly different image of God over that of the pagans. The neighbor was not like the true God, but the absolute opposite. To drive the point home, Jesus describes the way a healthy parent responds to a child: "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" He went on: "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, HOW MUCH MORE will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" You see, to the mystery of Godness, Jesus gave a face, and on that face He put a smile – the expression of a loving parent – which is another way of saying that Jesus ultimately opened the way for love to cast out fear and for a sense of sufficiency to take place of a sense of scarcity.

When that transformation happens at the deepest level, then prayer ceases to be a pressing against reluctance and becomes rather a confident sharing with a God who already and deeply cares about us. (help from John Claypool, *STORIES JESUS STILL TELLS: THE PARABLES*, and Judy Buck-Glenn, in *HOMILY SERVICE*, July 2007)

Second, I know that was a lot of background – but it's a super-rich text! So let me see if we can tease out some of its deep spiritual ramifications. The theology given in this text gives us the right mind-set for prayer. We are not praying to a God who is reluctant or indifferent to us or our needs. No, the One we pray to gives us MORE than we can ask for – or even imagine – He gives us His very self in the Holy Spirit – because

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that is God's nature as our loving Parent. He gives us HIMSELF. Which means that there is, always, enough – always has been and always will be. And realizing this makes all the difference in our prayer – and all the difference in the world.

Third, four examples of the fruit of this type of prayer – the work of the Holy Spirit giving us exactly what we *need*, but not always what we ask for. A woman prays: "Please, God, cure me of my cancer." But she is NOT cured. In dealing with her illness, she eventually comes to accept her mortality. She comes to cherish each moment she has. Her relationship with her husband becomes stronger; she grows closer to her children, especially one daughter from whom she had become increasingly distant. The disease runs its course – but she learns to live her life to the full and she spends every moment to the end in the embrace of her loving family. And it is that love that she leaves behind. She ASKS – and she receives – insight, understanding and peace.

A teenager seeks the answer to the question every teenager asks: "What am I supposed to do with my life?" He goes about his teen years in all their confusions and disappointments, their triumphs and discoveries; he realizes that he is not a child anymore and not the center of the world; he learns how to be responsible and to care about people other than himself and about things bigger than his own wants. Working at a summer camp for kids at risk proves to be a life-changing experience for him. He decides to major in social work in college. Not much money, but it's work that makes a difference. He SEEKS – and finds fulfillment in helping families keep it together.

Scared to death, she knocks on the door. Life will change when that door opens: a new career, perhaps; the beginning of a life of service in a religious community, maybe; an unexpected call to care for a desperately ill parent; meeting her future in-laws for the first time. But she's ready. She's confident in her skills, in her faith; the love that has enveloped her enables her to envelop others. She KNOCKS – and whatever is on the other side of the door, she is confident God's grace will enable her to walk through.

An elderly woman is struggling to pray, but it's just not working. She says the right words, but she has no sense of God's presence. Her pastor counsels her to go to her room each day and, for 15 minutes, to knit before the face of God. The pastor forbids her to say a single word of prayer: "Just knit and try to enjoy the quiet of your room," he tells her.

The woman thinks, *15 minutes to do nothing and not feel guilty!* So she gives it a try. Slowly she begins to enter the silence created by her noiseless knitting. And she begins to perceive "That this silence is not simply the absence of noise; this silence has substance. It is not the absence of something; rather, it is the presence of something, SOMEONE. Continuing to knit, she discovers "at the heart of silence, there is God; who is all stillness, all peace, all poise."

Prayer is not simply a formula of words. It is the awareness of God as the source of all that is good and the ultimate fulfillment of our life's journey. Prayer is not the scope and breadth of the words we utter but the sense of gratitude that compels us to give voice to those prayers. Authentic prayer enables us to realize God's love in our love for family and friends and their love for us; to see God's hand nurturing and sustaining every molecule of creation; to feel God's life-giving breath animating every moment of our existence. Jesus calls us to be men and women of prayer that begins and ends with realizing how blessed we are by God: to embrace the spirit and attitude of prayer that actively seeks out and gratefully celebrates God's compassion present in every heart and his peace in all things, and to rest secure, ASSURED, in OUR FATHER, OUR DADDY'S arms. Amen. (adapted from Jay Courmier, CONNECTIONS, July 2016, p. 3-4)

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