

Pentecost 19 / October 16, 2022

Luke 18:1

“And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

Persistence, Patience, Faith

Our gospel begins with Luke saying, Jesus the disciples, “that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart.” Then He told a parable about a woman who petitioned a judge for justice with persistence and patience. Although the judge was not much of a judge and cared nothing for people or for God, her persistence finally wore him down so he answered her request. He does what she requests in his words, “so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.” Jesus wants us to pray with persistence and patience and most of all with faith.

God is neither unjust nor uncaring like the judge in Jesus’ parable. God is kind, loving and gracious to all whom He has made, especially to those whom He has made His children for the sake of Christ Jesus. Jesus wants us to pray in the confidence that God loves us and will answer us in His way, in His time and for our eternal good. If an unjust and uncaring judge will respond to the patience and persistence of a petitioner, how much more readily will God give good things to His elect who cry out to Him day and night. As Jesus says, “He will give justice to them speedily.”

Prayer is an important indicator of our spiritual health in relation to God. The closeness of a relationship is often indicated by the amount of conversation in the relationship. Circumstances can prevent frequent conversation and perhaps prevent it entirely, but its hard to have a close relationship with people we seldom if ever communicate with; even more so when we feel no desire to talk with them. If not talking to someone improves your relationship with another person, there’s something wrong with the relationship. We may think of prayer as asking for things, as in this parable. However, as much as making petitions for ourselves and others is an aspect of prayer, the heart of prayer is talking to God. The basis of prayer is love. We talk to God because He loves us. We pray because we love God. Prayer is a response of love. We love because He first loved us. We pray because He has spoken to us in His word and continuously speaks to our spirits through the Holy Spirit whom He has given to dwell within us. We pray through the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul writes in the letter to the Romans saying, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” The Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in our hearts. The Holy Spirit impels us to exercise and express our faith in many ways. One of the most important exercises and expressions of faith is prayer. Through prayer God draws us close to the heart of His love in Christ Jesus. God answers every prayer of His beloved children, chosen and elected for the sake of Christ. Sometimes He answers our petitions immediately and in an unmistakable manner. Other times He withholds His answer until the time is right and in order to develop a character of patience and persistence in our spirits. Sometimes He does not grant our request, but always in every prayer He answers by strengthening our faith and drawing us closer to the heart of His love in Christ Jesus. In all things God works for the good of His children whom He has chosen for salvation and elected to eternal life through the blood of Christ.

In the world petitions that get the attention of government officials are the ones with the most signatures. In Jesus’ parable the woman received justice, because her persistence was wearing down the judge, who felt like a person receiving a beating. That’s the way of the world, but we approach God in a different manner. We approach God in prayer believing He loves us, trusting He hears us in love and in love, knows what we need before we ask Him, even before we know ourselves. Jesus warned the disciples against public prayers that draw attention to the person praying rather than to God and His love. He said, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners, that they may be seen by others.” He warned against prayers that seek to influence God by their length, eloquence and persuasive power, saying “Your Father in heaven knows what you need before you ask Him.”

God doesn’t hear us because of our words. He hears us because of His word, through which He urges us to call on Him and promises to help us. In Psalm 50 He says, “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.” God hears us for the sake of the Word become flesh, Christ Jesus. God has delivered us from sin, the devil and eternal death through Christ our Saviour. He will hear us when we call. For His sake He will answer us when we pray. Jesus taught the disciples to pray from the heart in response to the heart of God’s love. God hears us wherever pray. God answers, whether our words are few or many, whether they are eloquent or inarticulate. He hears and answers because He loves us. We know He loves us because He gave Christ for us! In the letter to the Romans

St. Paul wrote, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" We know He loves us, hears our prayers and answers for our eternal good, because He has given Christ to be our Saviour.

We pray in Jesus' name not as a formula for prayer, but as an expression of our faith in Him as Saviour. Prayer is important, because through prayer we draw close to Christ and in turn Christ draws us closer to Himself. In this parable Jesus encourages persistent, patient prayer as an expression of faith. His concluding words focus on faith as He asks rhetorically, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth." Faith and prayer walk side by side. Prayer is a first expression of faith. The first thing the thief on the cross did when he came to faith was to pray, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Relationships are maintained and enhanced through conversation. Even as our relationships with people deteriorates when we stop talking with them and eventually dies, so our faith falters and our relationship with God deteriorates, when we become cold and sluggish in our prayers.

Prayer doesn't create faith, prayer exercises faith. Prayer doesn't sustain faith, but through prayer our hearts are directed to Him who nourishes our faith through the word and working of His Spirit. Prayer doesn't bring us closer to God, rather through prayer we realize again how close God always is to us through Christ our Saviour, through whom He graciously gives us all things. We pray not to let God know what we need. God knows all things without our bringing anything to His attention. God knows and answers even before we call. He said through Isaiah, "Before they call, I will answer." We pray so we may hear God answer with the assurance that He is with us and nothing will separate us from His love in Christ Jesus. God answers our prayers with His promise that He will bring our faith to fulfillment in our share of Christ's resurrection to eternal life. He hears and answers for the encouragement of our faith and to assure us of our eternal vindication in the resurrection to life everlasting. In Jesus' Name. Amen