

I think that today's Gospel passage from Luke is familiar to all of us. In this passage, our Lord's disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. "When you pray," Jesus said, "pray like this....," and what follows is the outline of what we know as the "Lord's Prayer." It is the perfect prayer. It acknowledges God's holiness. It also looks forward to that time when God's love will reign in Christ throughout the world. It acknowledges our dependence on God in all things, and it acknowledges our humanity, together with our human limitations, limitations that make us dependent on God for the restoration of our souls. Would that we modeled all our prayers on the Lord's Prayer, for praying, then, would certainly be less self-centered and whining.

There is more in this passage, though, than just the Lord's Prayer. Jesus tells us a lot about God, and God's love for us. He tells us first of all that God loves us because we are his children. He tells us that God regards us highly, because he invested his love for us by making us the guardians of his Creation. Jesus tells us, in words that have rung clearly and beautifully over the centuries that we ought to expect God to listen and respond to our prayers, each and every time we pray. "Ask and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened." For everyone who asks does receive, and he or she who seeks finds, and for the one who knocks, the door is opened. This is the witness of countless generations of Christians. Jesus said, "If you were a father and your son asked for a fish, would you, instead, give him a snake? If you were a mother, and your child asked for an egg, would you poison her?" Jesus told us that if we would do good things for our children, should we be surprised that God, too, has a burning desire to do good things for those who love him?

I wonder, sometimes, whether we forget that God *is* in charge and, secondly, that God loves us and wants only the best for us. John Mcquarrie, one of the greatest of modern Episcopal theologians, reminded us of what the Evangelist John has been telling us for two thousand years, through his Gospel. You can define God very simply. "God is love!" The very essence of God is love. God, by his nature, by his being, is never other than loving. God's love is an other-centered, enabling love that is in no way, shape or form self-centered and self-serving. God does not love us because it makes him feel good about himself. He loves us in a way that should ultimately make *us* feel good about *ourselves*, because all he wants is that we be our best and live to our fullest. God's love is an enabling love that comes without strings. We are not his puppets. We are not his toys. We are not his slaves. We could be all of these things, if that were God's choice, but that is not the way God wants it. We are the high point of Creation. We are, as Saint Paul told us, adopted children of God, complete with birthright, because we are redeemed through the Cross, made sisters and brothers of Jesus the Christ by our Lord's passion. Jesus tells us that, because we are God's children, it is God's pleasure to do good things for us. So, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. For, as Jesus also said, he stands in the door, waiting for you and for me.

We forget this, from time to time. It is the nature of us all to occasionally let the beast known as anxiety growl so loudly that doubt overcomes faith. That is unfortunate, because when doubt overcomes faith and we lose hope, faith and hope wane and sin finds gain. But God understands this. I think that is why Jesus taught us, in the Lord's Prayer, to ask the Father, through the Holy Spirit, to keep us from temptation. This acknowledges that, left to our own devices, we sometimes drift, and that, ultimately, hope and faith are ours only by the grace of God.

Isn't it wonderful to know that it is the Father's will to do good things for us, because we are his children? Isn't it well to realize that, in love, he gives us good gifts, especially the gift of his Son? Doesn't it make our day grand to remind ourselves that, in the offering of Christ's sacrifice, God has given us the gift of abundant life?

May the proclaimed Word bless you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*