

XVII Sunday 07.25.2010

Sacred Heart and St. Ann's Churches.

A mother had been teaching her three-year-old daughter the Lord's Prayer. For several evenings at bedtime, the little girl would repeat the lines after her mother. Finally, the little girl decided to go solo. The child carefully recited each word right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail." Well, she nearly got it right.

You might have read the book titled *'Barriers to Christian Belief'* written by Leonard Griffith. In that book he deals with some problems that have been real obstacles and stumbling blocks for people in their faith journey. It deals with specific problems that hinder people, that burden people, that disturb people and keep them away from the Christian faith. One of the barriers he listed was "unanswered prayer." It seems to be a fact in our experience that many people do get discouraged and they do give up and drop out on the faith because they feel a sense of failure in their prayer life.

This leads us to ask the question "How do you pray?" "Why pray at all?" "When do you pray?" "Is there a special formula that should be used?" We are not the first to ask. The disciples of Jesus came to Him one day and said, "Lord, Teach us to pray!" So, Jesus taught them how to pray. Let us see some of the elements that the disciples learned from Jesus which lead them to a meaningful prayer life.

I. FIRST OF ALL, JESUS PRAYED REGULARLY.

He took the time to pray. He made it a vital part of His daily schedule. He disciplined himself to pray regularly. We know about busy schedules. We know about deadlines. We know about time pressures in our busy lifestyle. But we also know that when we feel we are so busy and our schedules are so hectic to the point that we can't afford to take time to pray then that's the moment when we need to pray most!

The English missionary, Florence Allshorn, once said "There is only one test of our prayer life. Do we want God? Do we want Him so much that we will go on even if it takes 5, 6, 10 years to find Him? There is only one test, do we really want God?"

Everything worthwhile takes time. Ask any artist. Ask any musician. Ask any athlete. It takes time, effort, and determination. You have to stay at it. It doesn't come over night - it doesn't stay with you unless you stay with it. Maybe the same is true with prayer. Maybe it just takes a lot of practice. If Jesus felt the need to pray regularly, how much more must we need to pray regularly?

II. SECOND, JESUS PRAYED SENSIBLY.

Jesus prayed with intelligent common sense. He did not use prayer as some magical device to get some selfish wishes. The poet Longfellow said it right: "What disputes we should be bringing into the universe if all our prayers were answered! Then we should govern the world and not God. And do you think we should govern it better? It gives me pain to hear the long petitions of folks asking for things they do not really need!"

How it is to see God as nothing more than a thing to be used for our own selfish desires. How meaningless to picture God as some kind of divine waiter who, at our slightest impulse, rushes to a heavenly kitchen and then runs back with steaming portions of whatever we have asked for! How bad it is to expect God to do for us what we can do for ourselves!

Jesus prayed regularly and He prayed sensibly.

III. FINALLY, JESUS PRAYED CONFIDENTLY.

"Thy will be done" that was the prayer of Jesus and it is a prayer we can pray with confidence because God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what we need and what is good for us better than we know. God, like a loving parent, knows what is best for His children. Our best prayer is a confident "Thy will be done!" One of the reasons Jesus prayed confidently was because He saw prayer as friendship with God. Someone once described prayer simply as "friendship with God."

There is a beautiful story about an elderly Scottish man who was very ill. The Priest came to see the dying man and noticed an empty chair in the opposite side of the bed. The chair was pulled up very close to the bed. The older man said, "Let me tell you about this chair. Many years ago I found it quite difficult to pray, so one day I shared this problem with my priest. He told me not to worry about kneeling or about placing myself in some pious position or about speaking in high-sounding words. Instead, Just sit down, put a chair in front of you, and imagine God is sitting there in that chair and then just talk to Him as you would talk to a friend." The older man said, "I've been doing that ever since."

Some days later, the daughter of the older man called the minister to tell him that her father had died peacefully. And then she said this: "For some reason, his hand was on that empty chair on the other side of the bed. Is that not strange?" "O no, the priest said, it's not strange at all. I understand perfectly. He was reaching out to his Best Friend." That's what prayer is. It's reaching out to God. It's reaching out to our best friend. Jesus prayed regularly, sensibly, confidently, and so we should.
