

Ask, search, knock---Learn, pray, act

How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

I can feel the stare..."We're sleeping 15 more minutes," I mumble...pat, pat, pat on my cheek..."five more minutes," I sigh...TAP, TAP, TAP, on the back of my head, a bit more persistent as I try to ignore the intrusion...then I feel the kitty claws gently combing my hair, grooming me for the day as it dawns. Yes, 3:30 a.m.-time to rise and shine. Food bowl is empty and my 15- year-old feline friend, Ty, needs something to eat. Is this what radical hospitality is about?! I don't think so, but it does give credibility to the idea of persistence.

Jesus' disciples have observed him praying at all hours, including the wee ones...and on this particular occasion, waiting for him to finish, might there be some significance to this waiting rather than interrupting? Just wondering...anyway, one of his disciples asks (says) "Lord teach **us** to pray, as John taught his disciples."

It's tempting to believe that Jesus' response is quite simple; like the instructions for preparing an animal collagen- protein made up from connective tissues such as skin, tendon, ligaments, and bones...jello mold given by Mrs. Barth, my 7th grade Home Economics teacher, to our all-girl class as we broke into groups of four, to go into our "kitchens" in the Home-Ec Department at my High School... how is it that such a mold, properly prepared and perfectly presented earned credits and held the least bit of importance and credibility? Ahh, the still late 1960s...

Moving on. "Molding" a relationship with the Trinity is a gift freely offered, though it is likely to go unnoticed if you and I don't have the courage to spread (teach about) the Good News. The instructions that Jesus shares aren't difficult but do require more of a time commitment and desiring of relationship (persistence) than does mixing a few ingredients and chilling them in a copper-colored mold to shape them. And without a true connection and community, a constancy, quite possibly, we melt on the plate, like gelatin left in the heat. Gently shaped and molded by our creator, as we grow in the stature of Christ and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, our hearts and minds take shape and inform us as to how it is we may be followers of The Way.

Father-Divine Mystery-Creator-Love; Hallowed-Holy-Sacred-Revered - Your kingdom- one of peace, justice, truth, restoration-come

Give us each day our daily bread-fed with fruits of the Spirit and thirst-quenching Living Water
And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us-that mercy and compassion are greater than the desire for vengeance and retribution and cost-counting. And do not bring us to the time of trial-help us to live in such a way that we may be at peace.

It seems worth noting that in Luke's writing, in verse 8, it isn't said whatever he wants, but whatever he needs...Then, Ask, search, knock and do so with persistence.

Yes, prayer happens in dark, quiet, private places. Prayer happens in moments of deep fear, of yearning, of reckoning. This is that precious connection that strengthens and binds. But, I ask you to consider the idea that prayer is not meant to stay just between us and God. As is exhorted in today's reading from Colossians, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him"... I suggest this means that one follows his example, promoting a community (kingdom) in which ALL Creation, human and otherwise is welcomed and supported, one in which social and racial justice is prized, one in which it isn't the individual, parish or church that is promoted, rather it is a radical hospitality born of the strength of our prayers, personal and corporate, allowing us to become the hands and feet of Jesus in today's world. Asking, seeking, knocking, faithfully believing that this is one way we know that God is with us, even when challenges seem insurmountable.

Learn, Act, Pray-the words included on the prayer card of the Pledge of Faith and Action Against Racial Injustice for me, seem quite aligned with the steps Jesus presents to his disciples. Ask- (we learn by asking), Search- praying is a way of searching and aids us as we dialog with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit and one another, those who are like us and those who differ- and knocking, acting in faith and anticipating an opening to the ways and means we are to serve; using our gifts and talents, individually and collectively, to create the Kingdom in the very spaces we inhabit each day. Might this also mean we help supply "daily bread" to others in need?

Brian Stevenson, at Christ Church, Charlotte, in 2016 offered this prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for this amazing space, thank you for the amazing people that you have brought to this place. We thank you for your love. We thank you for your grace. We thank you for your mercy. God we are praying for your courage, for you to give us the will, give us the heart, give us the mind, give us the spirit to draw closer to you. And by drawing closer to you, drawing closer to your people- your people who are suffering, your people who are struggling, your people who are incarcerated, your people who are hungry, your people who are naked, your people who need us to be near them to show them your grace and mercy. Lord, teach us to go to difficult places and say, "I am here." Teach us what it means to change narratives. Teach us what it means to be hopeful. Teach us what it means to do uncomfortable things in your service. God we bless you for the opportunity and privilege of being able to represent you on this earth. Empower us to represent your grace, your mercy, your calling for redemption and transformation. We ask that you give us all the blessings that we need to do these works, to live this life in your name. Amen.

Through prayer God most often changes us. God's self-giving sustains, nourishes, strengthens, empowers, emboldens, and enables us to face the circumstances of life. We do so, sometimes with joy and gratitude, others with pain and loss. You and I can rest assured that we will never be given a scorpion rather than an egg; or a snake instead of a fish. We will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and perhaps be surprised and delighted by what waits behind the door!

Amen.