



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 24 July 2022

Pentecost 7

Jesus taught us to address God as our Father when we pray and assured us that we can trust the Lord to respond to our requests and needs. Therefore, let us come together in worship today assured that, as God's precious children, our prayers will be heard.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" Luke 11:1

An Illustration to set the scene

Have you ever heard anyone complain that their prayers seem to just bounce off the ceiling?

It is a fairly common expression.

At its heart lies an uncertainty over whether God loves us enough to listen to us.

We may worry that our prayers are too trivial to interest God, that we are not good enough for our requests to be heard, or that we do not express them adequately.

At first sight, the parable at the heart of today's reading does not help much with these insecurities.

It involves a person unwilling to get out of bed to help his friend.

He seems to respond only because he is fed up with his neighbour's persistent pleas.

Is this what God is like – someone we have to pester and beg to help us?

Fortunately, however, this passage is far more encouraging than it appears.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

To understand the parable of the friend at midnight, we need to know that in the society Jesus lived in people were expected to welcome visitors with open arms at any hour.

Even if their guests were unexpected, the custom was to lay on a lavish meal, and bread was a vital part of this.

If the host did not have any bread, neighbours were expected to help out.

Many scholars believe the sense behind verses five to seven is something like: **“Can you imagine asking a neighbour for bread to feed a weary traveller and that request being refused?”**

The answer Jesus expected would be an emphatic **“No!”**

There is controversy over the meaning of the Greek word often translated as **“persistence”**.

Many say it actually means **“shamelessness”**.

Indeed, the parable does not suggest the host repeatedly asked for bread.

Some say this **shamelessness** refers to the neighbour's wish to avoid **shame** – helping his friend only so he will not earn a bad reputation.

In first-century Jewish society, shame was to be avoided at all costs.

Others hold that shamelessness describes the host's unashamed boldness in his request for bread.

The point, however, is not that God answers only if we repeatedly plead and beg.

Rather, Jesus' point is that the neighbour did respond to his friend's request, not that he was reluctant to do so.

At the heart of the parable is the certainty that **a neighbour would help a friend.**

Even those not motivated by this would grant a friend's requests for more selfish reasons – *in order to avoid criticism or disturbed sleep.*

Jesus is not likening the neighbour to God and suggesting that God has dubious motives for answering our requests, or begrudges helping us.

He is pointing out that if even a fallible and selfish neighbour listens and responds to a request, how much more confident we can be that God will help when we ask, for God's love is perfect.

This idea that we can trust God to respond recurs throughout our reading.

It starts with Jesus teaching his disciples to address God as "**Father**" in the Lord's Prayer.

Later on, Jesus points out that even human parents, with all their imperfections, respond to their children's requests.

So we can be confident that our heavenly Father, who is perfect, lovingly meets our needs.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The message of our reading is that we can trust God to hear our prayers.

God is not reluctant to listen to what we have to say, nor does God need badgering.

We do not need to worry that our requests are too trivial or not well worded.

We can be confident that our prayers have got through – our loving Father has heard us.

So what about the times we do not receive the answers we have prayed for?

Our reading suggests this cannot be because our requests have fallen on deaf ears.

We may never know why some of our prayers seem to remain unanswered.

However, the message is that God's love for us is many, many times greater than the love friends have for each other, or the care a parent has for their child.

So even when the heavens seem silent, we can keep on trusting in our heavenly Father's care, for although our love is imperfect,

God's love is not.

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