

Homily. 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.C. 27/28 July 2019.

There are two ways to talk about prayer; thoroughly, but at length, or by briefly highlighting the main points. Granted the context of a weekend homily it'll come as no surprise to you that I've chosen the latter way.

Prayer is our way of listening to and speaking with God. It has to be learned just as Abraham did, and as Jesus Himself learnt to how to pray from Mary, Joseph and His Jewish faith community. In their turn the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and the gospel tells us what He taught them. We are always learners when it comes to praying.

In its best form prayer is our practice of the presence of God. This means a few things. It means that it takes practice, patience and persistence from our side. Prayer always begins with us finding something to be grateful to God, thanking God for these gifts. Lastly, it means that we shut up a bit and do some listening to God in all of the ways God speaks to us, through the people, things, events and the daily experiences of our lives. Only after listening do we get to have our say, because only then are we in the right frame of mind, properly tuned-in to God, to make any sensible requests that are according to God's will. And, it's God's will that matters.

Abraham was a listener always hearing God calling him onwards in his long journey of faith. He was patient and persistent in his prayer, as the 1st reading tells us.

Jesus taught His disciples to persist, never giving up on prayer, and as the Lord's Prayer itself shows, He taught them to begin with respectful, grateful thanks and praise to God before asking for what they needed.

There aren't any short-cuts to praying any more than there are short-cuts to good, worthwhile and meaningful communication. Practice of God's presence means what it says; a practice, a discipline and pattern we have to get ourselves into, persisting in this way come good or ill. As Jesus said, God already knows what we really need and what's truly good for us, for our world and our times, because God will never give us, God's family, scorpions or snakes. The best that we can prayerfully desire is the Holy Spirit, God's greatest gift, since it is a sharing with us in the very life of God and is our ever trustworthy helper in playing our small but vital part in the unfolding of God's plan.

So that, in brief, is what prayer and praying is for us; our persistent practice of the presence of God that permeates our everyday living until we completely receive the very Spirit of God within us, putting us in perfect tune with God's will and plan for our lives and for all of creation. If you think about this you'll soon realise that there's nothing more essential to our salvation, nor more vital for the future of humanity and this world than that type of praying.