

17 Sunday Ordinary Time C 2016  
July 23-24  
Frazee/Callaway

### Homily

Mary, my mother, I give myself totally to you as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument, in our immaculate and merciful hands, for bringing about the greatest glory to God. Amen.

Are you satisfied with your prayer life? Most of us would respond with an unqualified “No!” I am not happy with my prayer life. Some days I struggle to give a tithe of my time. Almost always, I sit down and forget to center myself so that I can give God my full attention. Most days I want to fulfill my commitment to prayer so that I can get on with more important things.

Even before we get to prayer, we must fight the spiritual battle that precedes EVERY time of prayer. Temptations of each sort. Lies of every degree. Distractions of all kinds.

One of the characteristics of personal prayer is the need for openness and honesty. If I come before God in denial of who I am and what I’ve done...prayer will be difficult. I’m not really praying, I’m pretending. If I come before God and spill my guts and chatter unceasingly and never stop to listen, I’ve only begun to pray. Personal prayer demands openness and a willingness to sit in religious silence, a silence in which God’s will can be discerned.

I wonder if, when we struggle with our commitments to personal prayer, it is because we are not ready to be honest. We know that the moment we open ourselves up to God all of the unfinished business of life is going to come crashing in on us. Life’s unfinished business is what we want to avoid. If we struggle with sins of the flesh, sins for which we are not ready to repent, we will struggle to pray. If we are struggling in marriage or friendship, we cannot pray without feeling the pain of those strained relationships. If we have been abused or if we have experienced some other vile trauma, all of that pain can surface in prayer. Prayer demands honesty. Sometimes honesty is so painful we would rather avoid it. In our avoidance of personal prayer, we deny God the power to affect our healing; we deny God the opportunity to show us the way to peace.

In the Lord’s prayer there are petitions which are the beginning of a remedy, 1) forgive us our sins 2) for we forgive everyone in debt to us. In the Lord’s Prayer we ask for forgiveness. In offering this petition with sincerity, we must be sorry for our sins. And if our sorrow is true, we will want not only to avoid these sins; we will grow to detest them. It is only a charade to ask forgiveness of a sin with which we intend to remain friends.

God's forgiveness of us is measured by our willingness to forgive. Sometimes forgiving others is like climbing a slippery hill; it takes several runs at it to finally get to the top. If you struggle to forgive people, begin the process with a smaller step. Pray for them. Pray a simple prayer that God will bless them. To hold people in prayer is, if just for a moment, to exist with them in God's love. God's love can conquer all things, even our pain and hatred. Once we are able to pray for people it is a smaller step to forgive them.

Personal prayer involves honesty and openness; it includes forgiving and asking for forgiveness. Personal prayer requires us to blind the evil one who endeavors to stop all prayer. Prayer in your daily life begins with a clear, simple, unbending commitment to do it.

And today's gospel adds one more thing; prayer is persistence. God will not block our number or screen our calls. God will, however, test the sincerity of our plea. In prayer, I have asked for a hundred things I do not need and would not be for me good. Persistence purifies our motives and allows the Holy Spirit time to prepare our hearts. Without these safeguards, grace would seem like magic and our intentions would be selfish.

Listen one more time to what God has promised to do: "I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."