

Intro.: At a banquet for the American Humanist Association, media mogul, Ted Turner, openly criticized conservative Christianity. He said, *"Jesus would be sick at his stomach over the way his ideas have been twisted."* He went on to say, *"I've been saved seven or eight times. But, I gave up on it, when, despite my prayers, my sister died. The more I strayed from my faith, the better I felt!"*

Ted Turner was certainly wrong, but his attitude concerning God and prayer is shared by many. Often people will pray about something for a while and when the answer doesn't come when they think it should or in the way they think it should, they just throw up their hands in defeat and say, "What's the use?" Many of us may not want to admit that we have done the same thing. But in today's Gospel Jesus tells us that when it comes to prayer, we should **"NEVER GIVE UP!"**

I. God Invites Us To Make Pests Of Ourselves.

A. I have often heard people say that they do not pray often, because there are other people who have greater needs and they do not want to bother God with all their problems. If you have ever felt that way then I want you to follow the example of Abraham who humbly, yet persistently, kept asking more and more from his Lord. I want you to hear Jesus inviting you in our Gospel to go ahead and make a pest of yourself. Like the friend going to His neighbor, do not worry about what time it is, how great or small your need, or what God might be busy doing on the other side of the door. Go ahead and make a nuisance of yourself. Ask, and keep on asking, and it will be given to you; seek, and keep on seeking, and you will find; knock, and keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you."

B. True friends are people we know we can bother, right? But, there are limits, like the man who went pounding on his friend's door in the middle of the night to ask for a few loaves of bread. How rude and presumptuous! Why should the man resting quietly in his bed be punished for his friend's stupidity and lack of planning? In our Gospel Jesus says that the man ***"answered from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.'"*** Even though it was a friend at his door the man would not get-up and give him anything. In the end it was not friendship but persistence in making a pest of himself that finally made the man get out of bed and give his friend what he wanted just to shut him up and get rid of him.

II. God Is Better Than A Reluctant Friend.

A. The point of this story is not that God only begrudgingly gives us the things we ask for in prayer, but to remind us that our Father in heaven is so much more generous. He is better than a reluctant neighbor who only gives us what we want to keep us quiet so that he can get back to sleep. This is all the more reason why we should not be afraid to ask, seek and knock. Our Father is always awake, always attentive to our prayers, and always ready to give us what we truly need. He will never say, "I cannot give you anything," because He is the One who gives us everything. As the Bible tells us, ***"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not, also along with Him graciously give us all things."*** (Rom. 8:32)

B. Out of love for us God sent His only begotten Son to become our truest friend. As Jesus taught us, ***"No greater love has anyone than this. That He lay down His life for His friends."*** (Jn. 15:13) and that is what He did for you and you and you and you and for everyone who has ever been or is yet to come. He heard the desperate prayers of humanity from heaven above and came down to us. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, our truest friend suffered, died and was buried for us. He was the one who willingly received the punishment for all that we have done or have failed to do. As the apostle writes in our epistle:

“You were dead in your trespasses...[but] God made [you] alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” (Col. 2:13-14) After this our friend and brother rose again in victory to publicly put to shame all the powers of evil. In Baptism He adopted us into His holy family to share in the everlasting love of our Heavenly Father.

III. Our Heavenly Father Gives The Best Gifts.

A. And from Him we receive every good and perfect gift - gifts that are far better than anything we could either desire or deserve.

Jesus says, ***“Though you are evil [you] know how to give good gifts to your children.”*** You would never knowingly give them something that is harmful to them, like a snake or a scorpion. But even then you are sinful and even your best desires and gifts are tainted. Your ways and your will are not always the same as God’s perfect ways and His holy will. As a parent, I know that sometimes the things that did for my children and the gifts I gave them may not have been the best for them. They were given out of selfish motives. Maybe, just maybe, it was not as much giving them what they needed out of love for them, but rather giving them what they wanted so that they would love me.

B. This is not the case with our heavenly Father. In His divine patience He is willing to let us be angry with Him when we don’t get our way if in the end it will work out for our good. In His divine wisdom He will not always give us what we want and answer our prayers with a yes. Sometimes He answers “No” or “Not yet” or “Let Me answer in another way.” This is not because He does not love us, but because He does love us. He loves us more than He ever needs to be loved by us. But one thing is certain – He will give us all that we need and the best gift of all – the Holy Spirit. In our Gospel Jesus says, ***“if you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*** This is the best gift from our Heavenly Father, that brings us to faith, strengthens our faith, and keeps us asking, seeking and knocking. This Spirit is the Spirit that delivers us from all our wants and fears and allows us to cry out, “Abba, Daddy,” with absolute confidence that He loves us, hears us, and will bless us with the best gifts of all.

IV. Jesus Teaches Us How To Pray.

A. These are the kinds of gifts for which Jesus taught His disciples to pray in the Lord’s Prayer. First, he taught them that when they prayed it was not to some distant, vengeful deity, but to their Father, in heaven. He wanted them to know, as we all should, that God wants us to pray and to make pests of ourselves and to ask Him for things like beloved children ask their loving father. Then He taught them that their prayers should flow from what they had received from God, from what He had revealed to them through His Word. They were to pray that His name be kept Holy by His Word being taught in its truth and purity and by their leading holy lives according to it. They were to pray for His kingdom to come to them and to others as they received the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. They were to pray for all their material needs and those of their neighbors. They were pray for the forgiveness that Christ offered them and for the ability to likewise forgive those who sin against them. And they were to pray for God’s guidance and protection from all temptations from the devil, the world and their own sinful flesh, and guard and protect them from all evil, so that they may continue to live forever as His dear children.

B. Still today, our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us how to pray. Our prayers continue to flow from what we first receive from Him. Here, in God’s proclamation, we learn the ways and the will of our Father in heaven. Here, through the Word and Sacraments, we receive His best gift of all, the Holy Spirit to teach us how to pray in

Jesus name and according to His will. Just as Jesus taught His disciples He instructs us that prayer does not begin, here, [in our hearts], but there, when God speaks to us through His Word of Law & Gospel and we listen. The outcome of the conversation between Abraham and the Lord in our Old Testament reading helps us see that our prayer is not to bend God's will to our desires, but to teach us to want and to accept His good and gracious will for us. We ask, seek, and knock not to force Him to reluctantly give us what we want, but so that we may joyfully and thankfully receive what He, out of Fatherly, Divine, goodness and mercy, wants us to have- His good and perfect gifts.

Concl.: With such a loving Father in heaven, and taught by our Lord Jesus how to pray in His name, how could we ever give up on prayer? We should all be like the 3-year-old boy (that Paul Harvey once told about) who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered the grocery store she said to him, "Now you're not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don't even ask."

So she put him up in the cart and he sat in the little child's seat while she wheeled down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. He saw the chocolate chip cookies and stood up in the seat and said, "Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you not even to ask. You're not going to get any at all." So he sat back down.

They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items they ended up back in the cookie aisle. "Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you that you can't have any. Now sit down and be quiet."

Finally, they were approaching the checkout lane. The little boy sensed that this may be his last chance. So just before they got to the line, he stood up on the seat of the cart and shouted in his loudest voice, "In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?"

Everybody throughout the store began to laugh. Some even applauded. And, due to the generosity of the other shoppers, the little boy and his mother left with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies. In the same way let us continue to pray in Jesus name knowing that we will receive far more than we deserve or could ever desire. Ask, seek, knock and never give up! Amen.