

9th Sunday after Pentecost, Series C
July 25, 2010
Genesis 18:20-32, “Let Us Pray”

TEXT: Genesis 18:20-32

²⁰Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

²²The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” ²⁶The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

²⁷Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?” “If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

²⁹Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

³⁰Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?” He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

³¹Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?” He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

³²Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?” He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

Surveys show that outside of Sunday worship and saying “grace” before a meal, the prayer life of most Christians is almost nil. We’ve heard again and again about the **importance of prayer**, the **benefits of prayer**, and the **power of prayer**. Then why don’t we pray more often? Even if we can’t think of anything we need for ourselves, others need our prayers, don’t they? And if we have no need to ask for anything, isn’t that all the more reason to offer prayers of thanks? Then why do we do so little of it? There are many possible reasons.

Today we will look at *only* three, and see what direction today’s Old Testament Reading might give us in better understanding prayer. We will also learn something more about the blessings of regular prayer.

I. Taking Prayer For Granted. One reason the prayer life of so many Christians is so minimal is that we take the privilege of praying too much for granted. Most of us grew up with the idea that talking to God is something any of us can do at any time, and over the years we may have developed a sort of privileged attitude, as if access to God were somehow normal and

ordinary. By taking God for granted we neglect prayer, or have forgotten altogether to pray. Think of how offensive such an attitude must be to God. It's a wonder that He ever listens to us at all.

The truth is, then, what right do we have to expect anything from God? Our Creator, however, is so merciful, so slow to anger and full of pity for His creatures, that He listens anyway. He likes to hear our prayers because to pray is to admit we are dependent on Him. We have a humble example in Abraham, who said: "Then Abraham spoke up again: 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes'" (Gen. 18:27). Abraham knew he had no right to expect God to listen to him, but he believed in **God's grace** – grace that God would be full of **compassion** and **steadfast love**.

You and I have even more reason than Abraham to believe that in spite of our sin and unworthiness, **God will be gracious**. We have seen the life of Christ and the **love** He showed. He is the proof that God's **love never lets go**, even of the worst of us.

What a great gift God is giving by stooping to listen to us! We are just tiny specks of dust before His majesty. When we say our personal prayers, we might keep this in mind. We can begin our prayers by saying, for example, "Lord, thank You for the privilege of praying to You at anytime, and for the assurance that You are listening."

II. False Notions of God. Besides taking the privilege of praying too much for granted, we also pray so little because we may have a false idea of God. Often today, if people even acknowledge the existence of "a" god, they describe him as an impersonal, mechanical god who is characterized as a cold, hard, and spiritless deity – an entity that has little or no feelings for us. For example the "god" made famous in the **Star Wars** movies is typical of the kind of god that fits into the mold of the modern world. The only way the characters in the movie series could refer to this god was by saying, "May the Force be with you." Such a god cannot feel what we feel, suffer with us, or die with us. Is this your idea of God?

Or is yours the God who was **made flesh** in Jesus Christ, who **felt** what we feel, **suffered** among us, and **died** with us? While it is true that no one has seen God and lives, we do know God in the person of Jesus Christ, is a person like us. The God we know Jesus is filled with **compassion** and **love**, a person who ascended into heaven and now **intercedes** for us at the right hand of God.

Let us remember this: the **real God** is the God we have come to know in Jesus Christ. He is the God Abraham knew in the Old Testament Reading. There was nothing mystical about Abraham's prayer. Abraham appealed to **God's heart**, and God responded with His heart. That's the way we need to pray to God today.

Christ's union with us means we are lifted with Him to the privileged position of sonship, making us **worthy** to call to God in prayer. With Christ

we can pray, "Our Father..." We can be as **bold** as Abraham when he pleaded for Sodom. Thank God for Jesus, for through Him we know better than to think of God as an impersonal force. And indifferent ... **He is not!**

III. Fatalistic. The third reason we in our modern age may have lost our eagerness for prayer is that we have become too fatalistic. If everything is going to happen according to God's unchangeable will anyhow, why bother to pray? The movie "Heaven Can Wait" portrayed God as someone whose timing and plans could not be changed no matter what the principle character did to try to change His mind. The movie's underlying message tried to teach us to have more faith in the world than in a god who wouldn't listen.

But the **personal God of Abraham** – and **us, holds our lives** in His hand. He **invites** and **encourages** us to bring our concerns before Him. Relying on the relationship that God had established with him in the covenant, Abraham was bold enough to approach God with his concern and to keep asking until he got down to *10 righteous people in Sodom*. He didn't think prayer was useless! God gave Abraham the power to pray and he used it. Abraham was able to keep on praying until his will was more in conformity with the will of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus makes the same point. He wants us to **ask** and He wants us to be **persistent**. He **will answer** our prayers, and even more important, He will **prepare** us to **accept** His answer by bringing our will into conformity with His.

Things are changed by our prayers. When we pray in **faith** and in **accord** with the **will of God**, things happen. His will may be unchangeable, but that will brings about many changes in the world and in our lives. God is always **bringing** a "new thing," **guiding** and **leading** those who believe in Him and respond to Him.

Even if you are the only one praying, you and God together constitute a majority when it is His will that is in control, just as Abraham and God were a majority. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective," James writes (5:16). This summer, we have taken a determined step to pray more – with and for each other. I am so pleased to see many brothers and sisters in faith attend our recent prayer meetings. **Our prayers are "powerful and effective"!** We are learning to **humble ourselves** before Him and **trust in Him** for His **divine providence** (2 Chron. 7:14). Let's keep it up! May we not grow weary in praying!

God is our Father, and we are His sons and daughters. Even though our prayers are sometimes impulsive, or angry, or self-serving, God wants us to pray. He wants us to communicate with Him. The more we pray, the closer we will be to Him. Let us **cherish** the **privilege of praying**, since by the grace of God all things are possible. May God bless your prayers. AMEN