

+ J. M. J.

As we ponder Jesus' words we may be asking the question why don't we get what we ask for in prayer. After all Jesus says **"ask and you will receive."** We are probably asking for some good things too, a job, health, success in selling a house, the conversion of a loved one, etc. The message of both the first reading and the reading from the Gospel is to remain persistent in prayer, yet even Abraham doesn't get what he asks for; Sodom is destroyed although Lot, Abraham's nephew is spared.

When times are good it is easy to count our blessings although there is the temptation to forget that we rely on God for everything. It is when we find ourselves in need that we are tempted to doubt and forget what God has done for us in our prosperous times. We must remember that along with saying "For everyone who asks, receives" Jesus added more. "The one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." If we consider these three commands and subsequent promises as a whole (we tend to remember in particular the first) they begin to show a picture less of God as simply one who grants our every wish and more of God giving us a particular gift if we are willing to ask, knock, and seek.

Consider the story that Jesus tells, and it is an odd story indeed. Not many of us have or ever will experience someone ringing our doorbell at midnight asking for bread. That's because this is a parable. It is highly symbolic. This person approaches his friend because he is lacking in something. What would be an example in our lives of someone who has journeyed and now approaching us asking for something? Faith.

Something is stirring in a person's heart; that person has an encounter with Jesus even if it is imperceptible to them at the time. That is why midnight is mentioned because it is at midnight in the Gospel when Christ, the bridegroom comes (Matt. 25:6). So that friend comes to us, seeing that our Christianity gives us great hope and peace and the friend wants to know why; that friend may express this with a question. Why as a Catholic do you believe in a certain teaching? Why do you attend church every Sunday? Why is the church adamant about marriage being a covenant between a man and a

woman only? Sometimes those questions can be really challenging and may even have us question our own faith or wondering ourselves. That is precisely what the Lord will always give us if we ask. The three loaves symbolize faith, hope, and love. If we are weak in our faith, if we are weak in our hope, if we are weak in our love, the Lord will always grant us an increase if only we but ask, seek, and knock. It is the Holy Spirit that brings the gifts of faith, hope, and love, and that is why Jesus tells us the gift of the Holy Spirit will not be refused to those who ask. Once our faith, hope, and love have been increased we can give it to another.

In that light the Lord tells us that what we should be praying for. It is not necessarily many of those immediate needs and concerns that are in the forefront of our mind. What are most important are those petitions in the Lord's Prayer, that through our actions others will be drawn into relationship with our loving Father. That's what hallowed be thy name means. That through our love and charity what we strive for and hope for in heaven, that happiness and joy will actually be present here on earth. "Thy kingdom come." "Give us each day our daily bread." That we may have all the material and spiritual things that we require which comes to us as a highpoint and most perfectly when we receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Finally we ask to have all of our sins forgiven and to have the grace to avoid sinning against and hurting others in the future.

Notice how after the Lord's Prayer the priest petitions that we may be free from evil, have peace, and free from sin and anxiety. That at the core is really what we desire and if we are free from evil, sin, anxiety, and have peace we are not burdened and worried about other things. If we approach the Lord and ask for the faith, hope, and love, which brings these things, we will not be refused in this life and certainly in the life to come.

**“Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”** If we pray the Our Father with faith and consider what we are asking, we will get those very things that we petition for; the Lord guarantees it. These are the things that God knows we truly need.

May God bless you.