

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
By: Deacon Ben Remmert  
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Genesis 18:20-32

Colossians 2:6-19

Luke 11:1-13

Lord, open my mouth to speak your truth and our hearts to hear it. Amen.

Some of my earliest memories of spending time with my dad would be kneeling by the bed and reciting the Lord's Prayer and immediately be followed by the customary "God bless" list: Mommy and Daddy, and sister, Grandma and Grandpa, Auntie, Uncle, the dog, the fish and the turtle. I also remember with each meal we would say grace at the dinner table. This would sometimes happen before the meal, but if we forget, my dad will often say to us, "Well we needed to check if the food was good before we give thanks to God for it." These personal and private acts of prayer have been a significant part of my life and some of these traditions I have brought into my children's lives.

Many of our faith questions with our Gospel reading today involve our prayer life. What role does prayer play in your life today? How often do you pray? For what do you pray? For how long do you pray? Why do you pray? Often when we talk about prayer, we often will talk about prayer as our way to communicate with God. And in this type of prayer description, I wonder what it looks like for many of us today. For when we talk about communication today, we remember that we live in a fast-paced, highly mobile and technological world which values any process that makes communication quick, to the point, and effective. However, in my experience little attention is given to human interaction on the phone anymore! Here's an example of what I went through earlier this week.

"Thank you for calling \_\_\_\_\_. "Please press 1 for the main menu.

Please press 1 for English or 2 for Spanish. Enter your 19-digit account number. Enter the 3 digit card verification number. Enter the last four of your SSN. Please wait while I retrieve your account information. All our customer service representatives are currently assisting other customers. Please do not hang up. Your call is important to us and will be answered in the order it was received." (*8 minutes later*)

"May I have your 19 digit account number, sir?"

"But I just gave that to the computer voice to "expedite the call."

"Yes sir, but I need to verify it for security purposes."

So I give it to him again.

"And may I have the 3-digit number on the back of your card, sir?"

"But, I gave that to the other voice too!"

"Yes sir, additional security verification is necessary." "Okay. Okay."

"And, Lastly sir, may I have the last 4 of the primary card holders SSN?"

"I know. I know. Security, right?" "Yes sir. Thank you."

"Now, Mr. Remmert, is your home address still.....?"

"Wait a minute. The computer didn't even ask for that!"

“Yes, sir. We are updating your records.”

“Is 555 555 5555 still the correct phone number?” “Yes”

“Great.” “Now, how may I be of assistance to you?”

“Well, to tell you the truth, I’ve been on this phone for so long I forgot!”

“Oh I’m sorry, sir. Let’s go through some of the options and maybe it will help you remember.”

“No thanks. I think I’ll just go online where I don’t have deal with a human.”

With communication like this, it’s no wonder when we talk about prayer as communicating with God, we have some challenges to discuss as a community of faith. We feel like there must be a formula to follow when we pray, like the proper prayer will give us proper results. Our Gospel for today calls us back to the beginning of praying as a sign of trust. Jesus does not present the Lord’s Prayer as a magical formula or as the only acceptable prayer, but offers it as a framework, one that is rooted and dependence on God, our loving parent, to trust in God. This is not just a prayer to recite, but it is a way to live and define all our relationships.

After teaching the disciples to these lessons on prayer, Jesus ends with a parable about some advice urging persistence. John Pilch suggests that a better translation of persistence, given the culture of Jesus’ world, would be “shamelessness.”<sup>1</sup> In a world where hospitality was so highly lifted, the continuous and shameless knocking would broadcast to the world the shameless behavior of a friend who would be on the couch rather than answer hospitality’s urgent need. In our first reading for today, you may think that Abraham wasn’t “humble,” given his willingness to bargain with God over whether to save Sodom and Gomorrah. But in his conversation with God, he establishes his humility when he says, “I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes.” (Gen 18:27)

In every prayer we should bring our requests in humility, knowing that it is through God’s grace and desire that we are invited into a relationship. We don’t pray from a point of advantage or leverage. We pray for mercy, not on merit. We pray out of love for continued love, from God and for others. We are invited today friends to reflect on the story of our prayer life and where it has taken us. We continue to ask, Lord, teach us to pray, call us to keep seeking. For in the very act of searching, we acknowledge that there is someone to be found-someone who loves us deeply. We knock because we believe that God is listening. We ask because we believe God loves us as children and that the good gift of the Holy Spirit is ours. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> John J Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle C* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1977), 116-117.