

Ask, Seek, and Knock

Luke 11:1-13

Introduction

James 1:17 says: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* God is the Giver of all good gifts. He wants to give us everything we need. Why do we at times, seem to be lacking? James goes on to say in **chapter 4** (read **James 4:2-3**). If we're not asking right, what is the answer? How should we ask?

How to Pray

In **verses 2-4** of our Gospel lesson Jesus tells the disciples to pray to the Father and ask for five things: 1) that God's name would be hallowed (this means for it to be made holy in us); 2) for His kingdom to come (that is, for His kingdom to come in our lives); 3) for God to give us our daily bread (to meet our daily needs for life on this earth); 4) forgiveness (because we forgive others); and 5) to not be led into temptation (so we don't keep on sinning). This is what God is concerned about. Is this how we pray?

God, the Father

We are to pray in faith to God the Father. We know He will answer our prayers. But in **verse 5-8**, the friend in Jesus' story who is sleeping is a picture of God. As Johann Spangenberg said about this story: *When we call on [God] in times of trouble or danger and He does not answer us so quickly, he seems to us to be asleep. And so, we continue to knock on the door of His fatherly heart with the hammer of prayer.*

Asking, Seeking, and Knocking

Is prayer merely asking God for things? Jesus says we are to ask, seek, and knock. The verbs here, "ask", "seek", and "knock" are present imperative, active. This is not just to ask once and go about our business, but to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. Jesus is calling for a persistent prayer life. An example of that is Isaac. *And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebecca his wife conceived (Genesis 25:21).* Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca. He was 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were born. They had been married for 20 years before she had any children. Luther says that here the verb "prayed" means *"to pray importunately and beyond measure," in such a way that by knocking and importuning [persistent harassment] in a vexatious manner we annoy God. We call it "prevail upon."*

Whole Life Prayer

But why does He say "Ask, seek, and knock?" This is to show us that prayer is more than just asking for things. Prayer requires a whole life commitment. Bede the Venerable said: *The gate of the kingdom must be asked for by praying. It must be sought after by living properly. It must be knocked at by persevering.* When we pray, we are approaching the gate of the kingdom of God. How can we do

that? **Psalm 15** has the answer (read **Psalm 15**). We can only dwell on God's holy hill by living properly. Then we can persistently knock on the door and ask for our needs to be met.

An Impossible Task

Of course, on our own it's impossible for us to live a holy life, to "live properly." Jesus forgives us and takes away the sin from our lives. But He doesn't take away the sin nature. That will be with us throughout this life. Losing that is one of the blessings we look forward to in the next life. We will have peace because we will no longer be tempted to sin. But for now, we are tempted, and, in our weakness, we give in to the temptation.

Means of Grace

Since it's impossible for us to live a holy life, God has given us the Means of Grace to appropriate that life. This is how we can approach God's holy hill. All we need for Communion are the elements, words of institution, distribution, and reception in faith. So, why do we have the Preface, the Sanctus, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, etc. in the Sacrament of the Altar? We are preparing ourselves to enter the Holy of Holies, approaching God's holy hill. When we receive the bread and wine, we are receiving the body and blood of Christ, along with every blessing and grace God has for us. Asking, seeking, and knocking is all about our relationship with God. When we avail ourselves of Word and Sacrament God maintains and strengthens that relationship.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
