

One of the fruitful and beautiful things that God asks us to do is to lift up our needs and the needs of others in prayer. Today we continue our easter message series reflecting on the power of prayer. When I read today's readings reflecting on what they tell us about the power of prayer, there are two passages that immediately pop out. In the second reading, John tells us in his letter, "We have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." Similarly, in our Gospel, John tells us, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you."

. . . So if I'm reading this right, all I need to do is remain in God, and He'll give me whatever I want! How cool is that! . . . in your experience, is that the way it works? When I was a young child, I took this to heart. I remember praying rosaries that the St. Louis Cardinals would win baseball games. And you know what, sometimes it worked! But sometimes it didn't. I figured when they didn't win, there must have been some of you Cubs fans out there praying against me.

How about you? Have you ever prayed for something and didn't get what you asked for? I think we all have. So if we want something and pray for it why doesn't God give it to us as the Gospel says? Is it because God doesn't want to give us what is good? Is it that we didn't keep His commandments or aren't remaining in Him? Is it because there is a Cub fan somewhere praying against us?

We've all heard stories like Aladdin, with lamps or magic charms where people are granted wishes. Usually, it doesn't end up very well for the people, because they wish for the wrong things that don't ultimately make them happy. The truth is that we don't always know what is best for us. Consider a gerbil in a cage, sitting on a table. The gerbil is gnawing at the bars and if the gerbil could pray, its prayer would be, "God get me out of this cage". Below the table, sits a cat with essentially the same prayer. Compared to God who is infinite and knows everything, we're like that gerbil. The truth is that we often don't know what is best for us. But God does and He wants to give us what is best for us.

You see, God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows how we feel and why we feel that way, even sometimes when we don't know ourselves. He also loves us more than we love ourselves. He always wants what is best for us and wants to give it to us, but he wants us to ask.

You might wonder why we need to ask, if God knows better than we do what we need and already wants to give it to us. Many of you have small children or like me had small children before they became very big children. As a parent, one very positive thing we do for our children is to allow them and even ask them to help us with a job. Most of the time, we could probably do the job better and faster by ourselves, but having the child help does three things. First, it gives the child the dignity of being able to contribute to the good of the family. Second, it teaches the child how to work. Finally, when the child spends time with you, your relationship grows deeper. God asks us to pray for our needs and the needs of others for exactly the same reasons. First, it gives us the dignity of being able to contribute to the good work that God desires to do. Second, it teaches us how to will the good for ourselves and others. Finally, as we spend time with God in prayer, our relationship with him will grow stronger.

Recently in my life, I have had a profound experience of the Power of Prayer that has changed how I look at prayer and God's reliable and loving answer to prayer. Two years ago right around Christmas time, my sister Peggy was diagnosed with cancer. Many of you know her, she and her family are parishioners here. We used to sing together with my family and some friends in a music group here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. When she was diagnosed, the outpouring of prayer was truly overwhelming. I and many others prayed daily for her physical healing, usually several times a day. I never prayed harder for anything in my life than I prayed for her to be healed. Yet physical healing never came. Through it all, however, she was joyful, positive and hopeful. Last year, shortly before easter, the doctors said that they had done all they could and she entered hospice. Yet she never lost her positive disposition, her hope and even joy. The weekend before she died, all my brothers and sisters came to visit and each one in turn got a chance to sit with her and visit. I'll never forget how she looked that weekend. She was radiant. When I got a chance to talk to her, she told me she was a little scared of the process of dying, because she had never done it before. But she told me that she was convinced that this was God's will even though she didn't understand it. She told me though, that because it was God's will, she wouldn't change it if she could.

That is the power of prayer. Prayer doesn't change God's mind because He already wants what is best for us. Prayer is an encounter with the Living God. It is through prayer that we remain in Christ like branches on the vine as our Gospel tells us and

allow Him to change us! The power of prayer is no less than the power to conform our minds to the very Will of God! When our will is conformed to His, our prayer is “Thy will be done”! And we can pray that with an expectant hope knowing that God’s will, whatever that may be, is ultimately what is best for us and will lead us to what we were made for, life with God Himself.

So how about you? What needs do you have to pray for? Do you have an expectant hope that God will answer your prayer with what is best for you? Are you willing to be transformed and accept God’s answer as gift even if you don’t understand it?