

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year C
“Shamelessly Pounding on God’s Door”

Through the Words of the Gospel, May Our Sins be Wiped Away

Holy Spirit, Help Me to Preach with Great Clarity and Great Charity

In 1887, a 14-year-old French girl by the name of Marie Francoise Therese Martin was graced with a vision of standing at the foot of the Cross, collecting the blood of Jesus and giving it to souls in need. Convinced that her prayers and sufferings could bring people to Christ, Therese boldly asked our Lord to give her some sign that she was correct in her belief. Later that same year, a Parisian by the name of Henry Pranzini was convicted of the murder of two women and a child and was sentenced to death at the guillotine. According to police reports, Pranzini showed absolutely no inclination to repent for his crime. Having read in the newspaper about Pranzini's upcoming execution, Therese Martin immediately began storming heaven for Pranzini's conversion. She prayed for many weeks—but Pranzini failed to repent for his sins. Therese had Masses offered for him—but there was still no change in the condemned Pranzini. Therese implored the intercession of Mary and other saints—but Pranzini refused to go to confession.

At the beginning of today's Gospel, we learn something *truly* amazing. God prays. Jesus of Nazareth prayed. God Himself, when He lived among us, lived a life of prayer—of communion with and talking to His Heavenly Father. Jesus was

never too busy to pray, and before every important action of His life, He drew apart to be alone with the Father in prayer. Jesus sets the standard for us to follow.

Witnessing Jesus at prayer and moved by His example, the disciples desire to know how to pray like Jesus prays. In answer to their request, Jesus gives us three teachings.

First, in giving us the Lord's Prayer, Jesus helps us to understand that we cannot claim to love God unless we are in regular communication with God through prayer. Our main goal in prayer is to become able and eager to respond to God's offer of His self-giving, image-perfecting love. In the first three petitions of the Our Father, we implore God to let humanity revere God's name as holy, to allow God's kingdom in heaven to reign on earth, and to give us the grace to put His Divine Will for each of our lives ahead of our own desires and needs. These are the things that each of us must seek if we are to truly profess that we love God and desire to live as His disciples.

Second, Jesus teaches us the manner in which we should pray. When the man in need of bread is basically told by his friend to "take a hike," to "get lost," the Gospel reading tells us that ultimately it is this man's persistence which leads his friend to provide help. But the word that Jesus uses means much more than persistence. A much better word would be shamelessness. Jesus is telling us to pray

in a shameless manner, to pray relentlessly, and without regard for custom or etiquette. Our prayer is supposed to be almost an act of desperation, without regard even to self-respect, begging God to give us the assistance we need. Our Lord is encouraging us to be a pest, to pound on the door and try to wear God out.

This is the way we see Abraham praying in our first reading. In one of the most famous stories about prayer throughout the Bible, Abraham is interceding for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, praying that God does not allow the punishment which these people have brought upon themselves because of their sexual immorality. Abraham himself has family in Sodom, his nephew Lot along with Lot's wife and two daughters. Abraham also has many enemies in Sodom and Gomorrah. But, having been told by God what the future holds for these people, Scripture tells us that Abraham "*drew nearer*" to God. When we pray, we too draw near to God and enter His presence. We see in Abraham's prayer two qualities which we should all strive for in our own prayer. Abraham prays with humility. He proclaims that, "*I am but dust and ashes,*" recognizing that he doesn't have the right to ask God for anything, that he is a mere creature and God is the Creator. And he also prays with shameless persistence, haggling with God as he tries to prevent the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham doesn't just ask, he pushes the envelope, knowing that our God will never grow impatient or angry with us if our heart and our prayer is sincere. He doesn't just seek to minimize the punishment,

but has the audacity to ask God to forego it all together. Abraham doesn't just knock, but pounds on the door of God's mercy. Abraham's prayer is an example of the shameless prayer that Jesus encourages from us today, wanting us to understand that we too should never be afraid to pester our God.

Finally, Jesus teaches us that this type of prayer *is* effective, especially when, instead of seeking earthly goods, we beg God to give us the gift of His Holy Spirit. Jesus is leading us to pray for higher gifts. He is asking each of us if we trust the Father to give good gifts, especially the gift of His guiding Spirit in our lives.

Summing all of Jesus' teaching up so simply yet so beautifully, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi tells us, "*Prayer ought to be humble, fervent, resigned, persevering and accompanied with great reverence. One should consider that he stands in the presence of God, and speaks with a Lord before whom the angels tremble from awe and fear.*"

As I spent time meditating and reflecting on today's readings, and coming to understand what Jesus is teaching us about prayer, I was struck by Abraham's generosity. Knowing the evil the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had given their lives over to, Abraham nevertheless finds it in his heart to intercede for them, to seek clemency from God for their sakes. This is a holy example of what prayer of intercession looks like, prayer in which we entrust ourselves to God's mercy,

especially by placing before the Father the concerns of others in need. Like all good prayer, intercessory prayer demonstrates a constant act of love to Jesus because it is an act of love toward those around us.

Since coming to St. Michael the Archangel Parish a little over three years ago, I have been struck by the number of times many of you have approached me and expressed your anxiety, your concern, and your worries about family members who have abandoned our faith and are living their lives far from God. Children, grandchildren, parents and other loved ones have made the decision that their lives have no place for God nor His ways. This is a cross, this is a heartbreak, which I too share with you as I also have people I deeply care for and love, but who have turned their backs on our Lord, on His Church, and on the lives of holiness God desires of them. Just as Abraham prayed for those in his family who had settled in Sodom, I believe we should never abandon hope for our own wayward loved ones but instead this should be the first group of people Jesus would have us shamelessly intercede for.

And just as Abraham prayed for his enemies, to those who had given themselves over to the deranged culture of Sodom and Gomorrah, I believe Jesus today would have us shamelessly pray for all of those who have embraced the sick culture we ourselves live in, a culture St. John Paul II termed the culture of death. We are called to intercede for those who have bought into the lies of this world, lies

which work to separate people from lives of holiness. In April of last year, Gallup reported that the number of Americans who claim church membership of any kind had fallen off a cliff, dropping below 50% for the first time in our nation's history. Officially, the United States is a pagan nation, and, if we are honest, we recognize that the influence of evil is growing rapidly in our culture. Even among those who profess to be Christians. One of the true luminaries in our Church today, Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, explains the danger of living in such a culture when he tells us, *"Today, many Christians are no longer even aware of the basic teachings of the Faith, so that there is a growing danger of missing the path to eternal life."*

When our Blessed Mother Mary appeared in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917, she pleaded with the three shepherd children, and with each one of us, to not simply pray, but as she declared, *"Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them."* Our Lady foresaw the errors and sinful beliefs that run so rampant throughout our culture of death today, and as she always does, she echoes her Son in today's Gospel and beseeches each of us to pray that the Father gives the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to all who have succumbed to the lies of this culture.

"Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me." This is the responsorial we declared five times this morning. When we humbly offer prayers of intercession, God does in fact hear us and we can trust that He will always answer

us. In today's reading from his Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul encourages us to have faith in the power of God. We must have absolute trust in this power, and shamelessly beg Jesus to nail to His Cross the sins of our wayward loved ones and the sins of those who deny Christ and His Church by embracing the lies promulgated by the culture of death. God is Abba—He is our loving, merciful, compassionate Father, and we must pray that He will send these lost sheep the grace to break through their stubbornness and their disregard for truth. As St. Peter Julian Eymard tells us so beautifully, *“Have confidence in prayer. It is the unfailing power which God has given us. By means of it you will obtain the salvation of the dear souls whom God has given you and all your loved ones.”*

When you return to your pew having received our Lord Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in Holy Eucharist, you will never be as close to Him as at that moment. Use that opportunity to shamelessly pray for those of your loved ones and those in our culture who have turned their backs on God, on His one true Church, and on His truth. Pray that God grant that these and all people may be reborn into the freedom of His Holy Spirit. And when you leave this sacred space, continue this effort with fervent prayer every day, offer Rosaries and ask for Mother Mary's help, attend daily Mass—all with the intention of bringing our wayward brothers and sisters home.

In a special way, let's also fervently pray for the young people of our parish who will be working with the Totus Tuus catechists this week, that their hearts will

be set on fire with love for Our Lord and that they will embrace His Divine Will for each of their lives and receive the grace to resist the lies and sinful beliefs our culture proposes to them.

As the date of Henry Pranzini's execution drew ever closer, Therese Martin humbly, persistently, and shamelessly continued to pray for his repentance and conversion, to pray that his soul would not be lost for all eternity. But Pranzini stubbornly refused God's grace. Then, on September 1st, 1887, just as the executioner was about to put his head onto the guillotine block, this hardened murderer seized the crucifix a priest offered him and, as the newspaper *La Croix* noted, "...kissed the Sacred Wounds three times." Because of the shameless and fervent intercessory prayer of St. Therese of Lisieux, Henry Pranzini had obtained God's mercy. On the day she called for help, our merciful God did indeed answer her. Let her example inspire each of us to never give up on those who appear to be lost, to pray shamelessly for souls in need, to pound on God's door, and to trust that—in whatever way He chooses—God will most certainly answer our prayers.