

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday after Trinity
July 28, 2019

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This morning's gospel is about prayer. And it is presented in three parts. There is the Lord's Prayer, then the story of the importunate friend (told only by St Luke) and finally a section on "answers to prayer." We get a change in approach, from the *forms* of prayer given in the Lord's Prayer, to a *teaching* about perseverance in prayer. But there is strict continuity in the whole section. St Luke found the Lord's story of the importunate friend in a detached tradition, and put it here to make the whole passage an exhortation to pray for spiritual blessings.

"Importunate" comes from Latin, meaning "*to be without access to a harbor or port.*" If you were in a sailboat off Chatham last Tuesday, you were importunate during the tornado on Cape Cod! Nowadays however "importunate" (if it is used at all) means *troublesome gatecrasher*. Think of *paparazzi* invading your private party! It is easy to believe Our Lord Jesus told His parable with humor. The moral is obvious right away. Jesus is not turning importunity into a virtue! His point is this: if we can get what we want by being pushy, how much more will patience move Our Heavenly Father to give us the good things we need! Our Lord told another parable with the same teaching. It is the story of the woman and the unjust judge. She pressed her case so much the judge gave in just to get her off his back! That parable must also have been told with humor.

In many places Holy Scripture instructs us how to approach Almighty God in prayer. The right recipe is a combination of humility, confidence, and the love a son or daughter has for a loving father. *Psalms 75* says "speak not with a stiff neck." And St James reminds us "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." (*James 4:6*) Even a loving father will resist a proud child. And St Paul told the Corinthians "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also." (*1 Corinthians 14:15*) The *understanding* is awareness our prayer is speaking with Almighty God Who is our Father and deserves our reverence. Finally, Scripture tells us the thing God loves in us is when we come to Him in the spirit of voluntary self-denial and penance. Daniel heard the angel say: "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words." (*Daniel 10:12*)

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The Lord's parable is told as part of that great Scriptural tradition of instruction on prayer. But it is still a funny little story! The man and his children are all in their beds. The man saying "I cannot rise and give thee" means "I do not wish to get up." And he probably does not want any shouting to awaken his family. Perhaps many of Our Lord's hearers have had that experience or were glad they hadn't! But Jesus never tells stories for entertainment. He wants us to be assured of the divine willingness to answer our petitions. All the saints, following the lead of their Master, tell us our prayers are *incredibly fruitful*, both for us and for others. Someday you and I will know the full extent of that fact and wish we had prayed more.

Saint Paul said: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church." (*Colossians 1:24*) How can anything be lacking in Christ's afflictions ... *unless* the Lord Himself has provided that all prayers accomplish something, as do all Masses, and the sacrificial living of souls in the mystical body of His Church? In that way what Paul suffers *can* be called Christ's afflictions. Almighty God gives so much to those who don't ask Him. How much more does He give to do those who do? That is what the saints tell us. And St Bernard said our *confidence is crucial*. Confidence is the measure of the graces we receive from God.

I have told some of you that from the time I can remember I had complete confidence in my father's love. As a little boy I remember when he came home from the office in the evening he would fix a drink for my mother and himself and sit in his easy chair and scan the evening paper before we were called to dinner. And I knew I could climb into his lap, crumple both his suit coat and newspaper, and be loved. I didn't do it often, because I knew I could do it and be loved.

If our relationship to Almighty God is really that of a child to his loving Father, then we have nothing to fear. Just as human fathers, with all their imperfections, want their children to have the best of everything, so God, in His perfect goodness and loving benevolence, will give us such gifts as He alone can give to His sons and daughters who are His beloved children. And that is *exactly* what God's Own Son wants you and me to know.