

Session Seven: Reflections on the Prayer Parables in Luke

Prayer

Prayer is essential for the Christian and it also is not easy if one is going to take it seriously.

- There would be no need for a parable about persistence in prayer if it were the case that prayer is free of difficulty.
- It is also true that organized, institutionalized, religious rituals, prayers, and clergy are necessary, however they all run a great risk of growing into self-justifying entities if not checked by humility.

What is the best disposition for prayer? Are we more like the Pharisee than we want to admit?

- If our prayer is about comparisons to others then our prayer is lacking.
- If we assess our prayer, including our engagement of Mass, on the scale of how comfortable we are, or whether or not it makes us emotionally feel good, then we are also acting like the Pharisee whose chief concern in his words was his own self-reinforcement.
- Sometimes a Mass or ritual that is fought and struggled through with perseverance and humility, and by setting one's feelings to the side, is the best kind of offering we can make.

What is the purpose of prayer?

- We can speculate what the persistent widow might have gained in terms of personal growth from having to be so persistent for so long with the dishonest judge.
- This offers an insight into why God allows us to wait at times for long stretches before our prayers are answered.
- In the act of continually having to ask, our hearts are stretched open further and further so that they can receive the great blessings that God wants to give.
- The persistent widow parable offers part of the remedy for our often Pharisee-like dispositions. Those who must persevere in prayer eventually have the pride pushed out of them.

“Will he find faith on earth?”

- Was it easier to pray in a prior era when the whole culture upheld the expectation that God was to be acknowledged?

- Previously in our nation there were public norms that all went to church on Sundays, that prayer always began public gatherings, that public monuments, buildings, and properties were explicitly dedicated to God.
 - A downside of such a cultural situation is that it can lead to a lack of internalization of faith and the need to pray. If everyone is doing it, the internal drive for it can diminish.
 - Perhaps the Lord is allowing our current moment of large-scale cultural apostasy so that a revival can take place with a deeper faith than we previously had.
 - A culture must persevere in prayer just as an individual person must. We must do so in the face of questions and doubts.
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- The secular, woke culture as a type of religion that condemns and judges the prior generations, convinced of its own righteousness. It is the Pharisee attitude. “I am thankful that I am not like my parents’ generation.”
 - Virtue signaling: even if we find ourselves doing something that is appropriate or good, we do so under the pressure to be noticed and to justify ourselves.
 - It is a secular religion of comparisons to others, without any acknowledgement of a higher authority with the power to judge, condemn, or save.
 - Ultimately it can only lead to a spiraling escalation of more comparisons because it is incapable of looking “upward,” which means it cannot look “downward” in humility either.
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- The dishonest judge as a comparison to all of the contemporary entities that are earthly, secular, without concern for us... yet we tend to put more faith in them than we do in God in day-to-day practice.
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- The Lord himself calls the judge unjust. Should not slide past the fact that a moral judgement is rendered here about any legal system or public official that does not express due concern for the vulnerable and needy.
 - We can and must evaluate our legal system, policies, and governing personnel in light of God’s moral law.

End of Session Seven