

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C (2025)

The “prosperity gospel” is a term—popular among evangelical preachers—that equates Christian faith with material wealth and financial success.

Some of its better-known tele-evangelists include Joyce Meyers, Bennie Hinn, and the most famous of all, Joel Osteen.

A recent *Times* poll found that 17 percent of American Christians identify explicitly with the “prosperity gospel” movement. 31 percent support the idea that “if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money.” A full 61 percent agree that “God wants people to be prosperous.”

Now, I’m going to say something that might make you feel like getting up and walking out the door, or sending me a nasty email, or not putting any money in the collection basket—but I have to say it.

God doesn’t owe you anything. God doesn’t owe me anything.

Now, I get how that might upset some of you. Most of us learned a long time ago that if we **do certain things for God**, God is “**obligated**” to do certain things for us.

We say the right things and pray the right way, so God has to give us **what we want**. And when that doesn’t happen, we justifiably get frustrated and begin to wonder what God is up to. Does God keep up his end of the bargain?

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“How long, O Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen!”

So says the prophet Habakkuk in today’s First Reading.

- We pray for a loved one to be healed. And we wait
- We pray for a better-paying job. And we wait
- We pray for a broken friendship to be healed. And we wait
- We pray for an end to poverty and injustice. And we wait

“How long, O Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen!”

I will admit it. It is not easy accepting that God never owes me anything—that I will not always **get what I deserve**. But think about that for a minute. What we are really saying is that we only want what we “deserve” when we have done **something good**.

What do we want God to do when we have done something bad? When we’ve **hurt** someone, **cheated** someone, or **neglected** someone? In those cases, do we still want God to give us what we “deserve”? I don’t think so.

The amazing thing about having a God who never owes us anything is that it **allows God to be God**. And that is a very good thing—because God always does what is best for us—even if we **can’t see it**, even if we **can’t understand it**.

And that brings us back to the request of John and James, Peter and Andrew, Thomas, and Philip, and the other six apostles, “**Lord, increase our faith!**”

Faith is not easy to define. Theologians have tried mightily, but words often fail to do justice to it. Sometimes it’s easier to understand faith by its **effects**, by the **fruits** it produces, by the **difference** it makes in the lives of those who receive the gift of faith with an open heart.

And while Jesus reminds us of the power of faith—a faith so mighty and awesome that a tree can be uprooted and tossed into the sea—Jesus wants to make certain that his disciples **don’t confuse heavenly power with earthly power.**

Rather, he makes clear that a true person of faith acts to fulfill **what God is asking of him**— because it is the “**right**” thing to do, because faith comes with a kind of “**obligation**”—a sincere duty to **act in God’s interests and in no other.**

It is that deep and abiding faith that allows us to:

- **Hope** when things seem hopeless.
- **Trust** when life seems to be spiraling out of control.
- **Believe** even if the evidence is hard to see.
- **Give** even when we don't have much.
- **Forgive** even if they are not sorry.
- **Love** even when we don't feel like it.

Jesus is not like a McDonald's. He does not need to supersize our faith.

Faith is not a pat on the back, a reward, or a promotion. It is simply the way in which we live, move, and have our being, so that, at the end of the day, we can say, without pride or shame, "We have done only what we ought to have done!"

"Where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith." St. Francis of Assisi