

**Homily for the 17 Sunday in Ordinary Time
8th Anniversary of Episcopal Ordination
Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption
Saginaw, Michigan
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I love these readings the Church gives us today. They speak of an outrageous God. God is OUTRAGEOUS! he is a radical lover.

They speak of an audacious Abraham. Abraham is AUDACIOUS. He is very bold. Are we as audacious as Abraham is?

Abraham isn't asking God for some extra time so that all the innocent people can escape; but he is asking God to spare the entire population because of the innocent few. He wants God to be merciful to the entire population of two cities for the sake of ten people.

God “gives up or loses” the bargaining. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, sinful as they were, are of even greater concern to God than they are to Abraham bargaining on their behalf. God seems to want to lose this back and forth debate; God is ready and willing to give in to Abraham's haggling, *“For the sake of ten,”* he says, *“I will not destroy.”*

Abraham must have known intimately the heart and mind of God – a heart of mercy, a heart of forgiveness, a heart of compassion, a heart of love – that he could so courageously and boldly make such a request. This is the God the Jews worshiped in awe and reverence, with passionate commitment and trust, the God of mercy whose ear is turned towards those who address Him in such a way. There was nothing meek about Abraham's approach to God. Nor was there anything meek about God's response to him.

Perhaps this gives us some insight into what our own pattern of prayer should look like. Perhaps Abraham's model could be a model for us. So often we pray and ask for something because we feel we need it. Or we are praying for someone else's needs, whatever they may be because they need it. And that is good. There is nothing wrong with praying this way. It speaks of a dependence upon God. It is most important for us to pray. It is most important for us to petition God, even though He

knows our needs before we ask Him. Again, it speaks of a dependence upon God. But sometimes this dependence comes in the form of usury. By that I mean, how often do we only go to prayer when we want something from him – when we want some need of ours satisfied?

But perhaps we could take a different approach to prayer in regard to our focus. So often our focus is about us and our needs or others and their needs. Perhaps a better approach would be to ask, not because we want something or need it, but because we have a loving Father who wants to give it out of his love for us. In this way our prayer would be more about God and his desire for us; he delights in us. In other words, our focus becomes toward God and off of ourselves. This approach to prayer reveals a depth of intimacy and closeness to the Lord. It speaks more of a love relationship with him.

Perhaps our prayer could be something like this: “Lord, I ask for such things, not so much because I need them, but more so because you love me too much. And because I believe and trust in your “too much” love, I come before you with my request.”

When was the last time you prayed in such a way? Instead of “Lord, you know my love for you and therefore, I come begging again out of my love, etc.” Perhaps we can pray, “I come to you Lord because I know your love for me is great and beyond what I can imagine or have experienced.”

In this way the whole focus has shifted off ourselves and onto the God who desires such intimacy with each one of us. Or in other words, “Our Father in heaven...hollowed be thy name...thy kingdom come, thy will be done...on earth as it is in heaven.” In other words, our prayer begins where God is honored above all. He is the highest value in our lives. He is the focus of our prayer and the first one whom we acknowledge.

God does know what is best for us and will always give us what we need. *“For whoever asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; whoever knocks, is admitted.”*

Ultimately the goal of prayer is not for us to get everything we want or need. The goal of prayer is responding to an invitation into a love relationship with God. It is seeking union or communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and then responding to God’s outrageous love for us.

Prayer is also not so much what we ask of God, but the way we respond to what God asks of us, as well as the way in which we respond to what God gives to us.

What is perfect prayer? From my perspective, it is really our answer to God's call to grow in love with him and with one another.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus says, *"If you then, who are wicked (meaning sinful), know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"*

I find it interesting that Jesus doesn't say "how much more will the Father in heaven give good things, or things that are needed, or things that we want, to those who ask him, but he says, "how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

Perhaps there is a reason for this. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is the only thing that is really important in the life of a disciple of Jesus. Perhaps it is because the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity, who is the very deep and profound love between the Father and the Son, is what the Father wants us to have the most. But we must ask for it and it will be given to us.

Finally, perhaps it is because the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us to love God and our neighbor as Jesus did, enabling us to lay down our lives for others, as he laid down his life for you and for me.

A person who prays in such a way is a person who loves in such a way.
A community that prays in such a way is a community that loves in such a way.

It appears that there can be no greater gift for which to ask! When was the last time you prayed asking for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your lives?

Perhaps today we can all pray for this gift and pray for it daily, trusting that *"everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks finds; and the one who knocks, the door to the heart of the Father and Son will be opened."*

Like Abraham, may we have audacity, the audacity to pray for such a gift, knowing that God is outrageous enough to give it to us, not so much because we need it or want it, but because in receiving this tremendous gift of the Holy Spirit, we receive God himself.