

THE PRODIGAL: Sun. July 25, 2010

Sermon: “Seek, Knock, Kick, and Scream”

Sermon by: Fr. Bill Wigmore

*The first reading is from the book 12 Steps & 12 Traditions written by Bill Wilson.
This portion is taken from Step 11:*

In AA we have found that the actual good results of prayer are beyond question. They are matters of knowledge and experience. All those who have persisted have found strength not ordinarily their own. They have found wisdom beyond their usual capability. And they have increasingly found peace of mind which can stand firm in the face of difficult circumstances. ...

Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of *belonging* that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost, and frightened, and purposeless. The moment we catch even a glimpse of God's will, the moment we begin to see truth, justice, and love as the real and eternal things in life, we are no longer deeply disturbed by all the seeming evidence to the contrary that surrounds us in purely human affairs.

We know that God lovingly watches over us. We know that when we turn to Him, all will be well with us, here and hereafter.

Here ends the reading.

The second reading tonight is a modern version of Psalm 139:

Please read it with me, responding with the words in dark print:

Lord, you have searched me and you know me;

**you are closer to me than my thoughts.*

You see through my selfishness and weakness into my inmost self.

**There is not one corner of my mind that you do not know completely.*

You are present before me, behind me,

**and you hold me in the palm of your hand.*

Such knowledge is too awesome to grasp;

**so deep that I cannot fathom it.*

Where can I go from your Spirit?

**Where can I flee from your presence?*

If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the ends of the sea,

**even there your hand will guide me and your spirit will give me strength.*

If I rise to heaven, I meet you; **if I lie down in hell, you are there;*

If I say, "Let only darkness cover me, **and may everything turn to night.*"

Even there your hand will lead me;

for my darkness is not dark to you; **the night is as bright as the day.*

How measureless your mind is, O Lord;

**it contains inconceivable worlds and is vaster than space and time.*

If I ever tried to fathom it,

**I would be like a child counting the grains of sand on a beach.*

Search me, dear Lord; take me to the depths of my inmost heart.

**Root out all selfishness from me and lead me in the way to life.*

Here ends the reading.

A Reading from the Good News According to Luke:

On one occasion Jesus happened to be praying someplace.

When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him,

“Lord, teach us how to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

He said to them, “When you pray, you should say:

Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who has sinned against us;

and please don’t put us to the test.

Then Jesus said to them,

“Suppose you have a friend who comes to you in the middle of the night and says to you: *‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread*

for a friend of mine on a trip has shown up and I have nothing to offer him.’

And suppose you reply, *‘Stop bothering me.*

The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed.

I can’t get up to give you anything.’

I tell you, even though you won’t get up and give the friend anything out of friendship, yet you’ll get up and give the other whatever is needed because you’d be ashamed not to.”

“So I tell you, ***ask*** – *it’ll be given to you.* ***Seek*** – *and you’ll find.* ***Knock*** – *and the door will be opened for you.*

Rest assured, everyone who asks receives;

everyone who seeks finds;

and for the one who knocks, it is opened.

For which of you fathers would hand his son a snake when it’s fish he’s asking for?

Or give him a scorpion when it’s an egg he’s asking for?

So if you, shiftless as you are, know how to give your children good gifts, isn’t it much more likely that the heavenly Father will give holy spirit to those who ask him?”

Here ends the reading.

Sermon: Welcome - ... how’s everyone doing tonight?

You’ve probably heard the old saying that claims:

“You don’t find many atheists down in a fox-hole!”

- When the bullets are flying and when the bombs are landing right next to us, how quickly we begin to pray. **“God help me!”** we cry.

Fox-hole prayers are generally short & sweet – They come straight from the heart!

Nobody says to the soldier next to him, **“Hey Sarge! If you’ve got a minute - come teach me to pray - cause I think I’m gonna die!”**

- When we’re under fire, St. Nike has a way of taking over and—
we ... Just do it!

- But as soon as the battle's over
and when it looks like the enemy's stopped his shooting,
then we peek our heads out of that hole and we say,
 *"Thank you God – **but I probably over-reacted** –
 I think I can take it from here."*

Over the years, I've actually seen very few people get drunk because they couldn't handle the *adversities* that life's handed them.

- *Stuff happens!* - - - *But then, we find, so does grace.*
- If we're working our programs. God and our friends get us through the tough times.
- *But for some crazy reason* what does seem to get a lot of us drunks in trouble is *prosperity.*
- Addicts can't seem to handle it **when things go well.**

We get a little recovery under our belts - and if we're not careful,
we quickly forget the pain of just a short while ago.

Before we know it, we're not feeling *grateful at all* for our sobriety.

Now we're saying, *"I want more – And I'm entitled to it!*

Give me more money – more sex – more security –

Give me more of whatever it is that I think is gonna fix me.

And you all know where that kind thinking *leads us addicts.*

*And that's because for us, there's just **never enough*** of what we want!

- **Give an addict a lifetime of pleasure –
and he'll try to go through it *in three weeks time!***

Tonight's first reading from *The 12 & 12* - it talks to us about
 "**living life successfully** outside of the foxhole."

- How do we *live life* *on life's terms?*
- How do we **go forward in life**
 without slipping back into **the chaos and the hell** that most
 of us crawled out of?

The reading says that *if we want do that*

then one of the things we'll need to learn is: *How to pray.*

- Now in 12 Step programs, we don't learn how to pray and meditate
 just so we can become good little boys and girls and go sing
 in the choir somewhere.
- **We learn how to pray and meditate** – because its one of the
 things we need to *stay alive*
- It keeps us from re-enlisting and going right back into that war zone!

In tonight's gospel,

Jesus gives us some very *practical advice* for living life outside the
fox-hole.

The story starts off with one of his disciples asking Jesus if he'd teach
him how to pray.

And Jesus answers this man's request with parts of what we now
call: "The Lord's Prayer."

It's the prayer we say at the close of just about almost every 12 Step meeting we attend.

Luke's version says it like this:

- “Father, hallowed be thy name explore
- “Thy kingdom come” ... explore
- “Give us today our daily bread”... explore
- “And forgive us our sins –
 for we ourselves forgive everyone who has sinned against us”
 (We're forgiven as we forgive)
- *But then it adds: “Please don't put us to the test”*
- **We're weak** – We're powerless & unmanageable - don't let us be tempted beyond what we can endure – please, God: do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
- **That's why we pray!**

Then, finally, to make his point about all this prayer business, *Jesus tells a story:*

He says: Once there was a man who went to a neighbor to borrow three loaves of bread.

- The man needed the bread because another friend of his has just arrived at his house after a very long journey.
- **In the Oriental culture where Jesus lived**, the host is *honor-bound* to provide **hospitality**.
- And that means **he must** provide *food* to his traveling friend.
- If he refuses, or if he can't provide the needed food, then he'll be shamed in front of all his neighbors.
- **Honor** was extremely important in the culture where this story was first told.

And so Jesus says, the traveler arrives at this guy's house *hungry* – but his host has nothing to feed him.

So the man goes to a neighbor and he asks if he might borrow three loaves of bread.

He knows the hour is late.

He knows he's being a nuisance to his neighbor. But he doesn't want to be shamed.

And at first the neighbor tells the man to go away.

He says, “*The door is shut.*”

The kids are all tucked into bed and I can't get up.”

But Jesus tells us that **the man wouldn't go away.**

- The man would rather humble himself in front of his friend and in front of his neighbors, *than be shamed* for not providing the hospitality he owed.

And so he stands outside that neighbor's window and he begins to plead with him.

- He cries out to the man behind the door - **and his pleading gets louder and louder.**
- The other neighbors hear all the commotion –
- *and one by one they begin to get up from their beds.*
- They look out their windows to see what's going on. *And what do they see?*

They see a desperate man begging for bread.

He's humbling himself in front of his friend and in front them.

He absolutely refuses to take no for an answer.

His honor, his reputation and everything he hold
dear are at stake,
so he's willing to beg for what he needs.

- **It doesn't matter to this guy that the hour is late.**
- *It doesn't matter that the door is shut tight.*
- **It doesn't matter that the man's in bed and his children are asleep.**
- *It doesn't even matter that the man's already said, "No!" a dozen times before*

The man just keeps **asking, and knocking! *Knocking and asking!***
He does it until the neighbor with the bread finally gets up and gives it
to him because he know he isn't going to go away until he does.

- **Jesus says that's exactly the way we should approach God in our prayers.**
- **Not because God is going to be bullied into doing something -
but because we're going to get humble in the doing of it like that!**
- When we're asking for what we really **need**

and we're not asking simply for things we want,
then Jesus says this is how we are to pray:

*"Please, God, you've got to remove this obsession from me –
just for today. I can't do it without you
and I know I'm gonna be ruined
and my family's gonna be ruined if I drink or if I use today.
God, I can't leave here until you do this for me!"*

- **That's the kind of prayer Jesus says we should pray.**

Now that's a real different-sounding-prayer from the man or the woman in recovery who prays:

*"God, I hope I'm not disturbing you
but, please try to keep me sober.
Now if you're too busy to help me, I'll certainly understand
and I'll go away and I won't bother you any more."*

- **That kind of prayer will get us drunk before the sun goes down!**
- I think Jesus is telling us something important about *the God of his understanding* in this story.
- It makes a difference to God whether we ask for his help or not –
- And it somehow makes a difference how we ask - whether we're sincere or whether we're just going through the motions.
- God hears our prayers.
- And not only does he hear them, but our prayers can even change the mind of God.
- He's open to listening to us if we're open to hearing from him
- He delights when we ask – and he delights even more when he gives.
- Now that speaks of a very different understanding of God than the detached sort of God most of have been taught.

There's a beautiful story I once heard that tries to drive home this point.

It's a story from the Hindu tradition about a monk named **Narada**.
And the story's told that one day Narada's on his way to the temple to worship the Lord Vishnu.
And that night he stops at a certain village where a poor villager and his wife make him welcome.
When the villager learns that Narada's on a pilgrimage to the temple of Vishnu, he says to him,
"Will you pray to the Lord that we be given children?"

*My wife and I greatly desire children but the Lord has
not yet given them to us."*

Narada promises that he'll intercede for them.

So he sets out again, and when he reaches the temple he places the
petition of that villager before the Lord Vishnu.

But the Lord is abrupt in his reply.

He says, "*It is not the destiny of that man to have children.*"

Narada bows to this statement of the Lord and he returns to his home.

Now five years later he again sets out on a pilgrimage to that very same temple.
And once again he seeks and is given hospitality in the home of that simple villager.
This time, however, he's surprised to see three children playing in the courtyard.

"*Whose children are these?*" he asks.

"*Mine,*" says the villager.

And Narada asks, "*So, did the Lord did give you children after all?*"

"*Yes,*" replies the villager.

"*A little while after you left us five years ago, a saint passed through this village.*

He gave his blessing to me and to my wife and he prayed over us.

The Lord heard his prayer and gave us these three lovely children you see here."

Narada was dumbfounded and he couldn't wait to get to the Lord's temple the next day.

When he gets there the first thing he says to the Lord is:

"*Didn't you tell me it wasn't in the destiny of that man to have children?*

How is it that he has three children now?"

When the Lord Vishnu heard that, he laughed aloud and said,

"*That must be the doings of a saint.*

Saints have the power to change destiny!"

Now I know the Big Book says clearly that, "***we are not saints,***"

but it goes on to say *the point is that we are willing to grow along
spiritual lines.*

- *We're willing to be "saints in training."*

Learning how to pray and learning to ask forcefully for the things we
need is a vital part of growing along spiritual lines.

It's part of what will make God a real presence in our lives.

- **Jesus** says **Ask** / and it'll be given
- **Seek** / and we'll find what our hearts have been looking for
- **Knock** / and all the doors that seemed bolted and barred will be opened.

If we practice this kind of prayer, then, over time,

we'll come to experience God the same way Jesus experienced

God: a loving, and a faithful, and a giving Father:

a Father who *delights* in meeting the needs of his kids.

Jesus asks his disciples: "What father ***even among us*** –

if his child asks for a fish will give him a snake!

Or if his child asks for an egg, will hand him a scorpion!

If we want **good things for our children,**” Jesus asks,

how much more does our heavenly Father wait to give his gifts to those who ask?

But we have to ask.

And we have to seek.

And we have to knock.

And, just like our friend asking for the bread, Jesus says,

God will rise up in the middle of the night –

even in what may feel like the darkest night of our own lives –

and he'll hear our prayer and he'll give us what we need.

Let me close this thing with a short story of a man who tried to get into detox a few years back.

The counselor said to him: *“I’m sorry but there just aren’t any beds – you’ll have to come back tomorrow.”*

And the fellow responded, *“But, Mister, I don’t think you understand –*

If I leave here today - I’m gonna die.”

So the guy went and he waited outside –

He was there for three or four hours –

and finally – one of the people who was slated to come into

detox – he cancelled and a bed opened up –

and that man made it in.

He Sought – He knocked – He kicked and he screamed – God heard his prayer –

He got his bread – and like many of us here – he got a whole lot more!

AMEN!