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Harold G. Hermetz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

QUASIMODOGENITI, THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JESUS ASKS: DO YOU LOVE ME?

JOHN 21:15-19

The Propers for the Day

"Why don't you grow up?" is a question that has been thrown at each of us. But the name of this Sunday turns the question around and asks: "Why don't you become a baby again?" *Quasimodogeniti* means "as newborn babes," and it reminds us that we have been born again as children of God and we need to be just like hungry little children in our desire for the food of faith, God's Word. Only as we receive this power-packed nourishment can God work on our hearts to make us stronger in faith and more alive to Him in our daily life.

We pray about this in the Collect as we ask the help of God's grace to live the risen life, remembering that as Christ lives He wants us to live too — His kind of life.

The Epistle reminds us that it is faith in Christ that enables reborn children of God to live victoriously in this world.

The Gospel says "Amen" to this in the words of Jesus to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen Me and yet believe." John's Gospel intends to help us "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," and that believing we "may have life through His name."

The sermon offers help in examining your faith as it is shown in your love for the Savior.

Jesus Asks: Do You Love Me?

It's easy for us to have an attitude like that of the disciples who returned to their fishing in confusion and despair as we come to church on this Sunday after Easter. We were caught up in the Easter Sunday excitement

and sang the resurrection hymns with spirit and enthusiasm. But the Easter lilies have wilted now, the new Easter fashions are not new anymore, and we have begun to settle back into the same old comfortable ruts. Has our observance of Easter made a real difference in our lives? What could our risen Lord say to us, His modern-day disciples, that would lift us out of the "post-Easter slump" and make His life and power more evident in us?

Today He comes to us with one simple question, asking us to use it in a searching and honest examination of our faith that can lead us to live anew the risen life with Him.

I. This Is a Question You and I Need

A. You may be as sincere a Christian as Peter was — that's no guarantee that your love is what it should be. Peter was a foundation stone, a real pillar in the church, one of the Twelve. For three years he lived in close relationship with Christ, heard Him teach, saw His miracles. In a similar way your life may be one of rich spiritual experiences, and yet you could still be poor in real love for your Savior.

B. You may be an active, enthusiastic member of the church and still be lacking in the love for Christ which is the only acceptable motive for such activity and service. Impetuous Peter was ready to do and dare anything for Christ (Luke 18:28). He was willing to die if necessary, so strong was his pledge of loyalty (Mark 14:31). Yet that love wasn't strong enough. The same willingness and eagerness of Peter may be yours, but Jesus today takes you aside and asks quietly, "Was that really love for Me?"

C. You may be a proud and self-satisfied disciple as Peter was. His rash promise in Matt. 26:33 indicated that Peter had "I" trouble — too much pride and a self-

satisfied love. His confidence was more in Peter than in his Lord. Jesus' searching question is intended to lead Peter to confess humbly that he does not yet love His Savior as he should; that his love still lacks the higher consecration and depth that Christ expects. You and I need to apply to ourselves that same searching question of Jesus lest we smugly assume that our love for Him is what it should be. Jesus questions us to make us examine our love for Him and become dissatisfied with it. His question is intended not for His own assurance but for our sakes.

II. *This Is a Question Designed to Improve Our Understanding of Real Love*

A. Personal attachment to Christ like that which Peter professed is not enough. Christ wants no love merely because of His greatness as a teacher or moral example. "Do you love Me?" He asks, "Me as the Son of God who died for sinners like you and Peter? Me, the Way, the Truth, and the Life?"

B. A very special kind of love is expected by Christ. He wants the kind of love that He showed as He "loved us and gave Himself for us." The quality of self-sacrifice is expected in our love. His death on the cross can take the coldness and indifference from our hearts and fill us with this kind of warm, living love for Him.

C. This love, practiced in the everyday situations of our home, of the place where we earn our livelihood, of our leisure, of our voluntary service to the community, and of our political life, is the sign and evidence of the life that has been raised with Christ and has united us with Him by faith. This is the primary evidence that He looks for. His first concern is not your generous financial contributions to church or to charity, or your work in the women's circle or men's club of your church, but first of all your "faith active in love."

III. *This Question Is Aimed at Improving Our Understanding of Discipleship*

A. Loving Him is the one all-important qualification Jesus wants to see in you and me, His disciples. Without real love for Christ we become "a noisy gong" and "a clanging cymbal." Christ doesn't ask that we be perfect saints, skilled theologians, or charming conversationalists. He doesn't ask: "Will you live a good life?" Just one thing — love Him. He'll supply the resource for a life of discipleship.

B. Love for Him wants to show itself in service to Him and to others. Real love for Christ is restless to do things for Him. The young mother who lies on a hospital bed doesn't enjoy the forced rest, the good food, and the personal attention of nurses and doctors. She is restless to get back to her husband and children at home. Doing things for them is the outlet for her love. The Savior knows that your love wants to show itself in doing things for Him. That's why He says: "Feed My lambs. Feed My sheep." Bringing Christ and the riches of His risen life to others is the work He gives you. Teaching them to observe all that He has commanded you is the privilege entrusted to your love.

C. Love for Him means following Him, no matter what the cost. Christ paid a costly price for you, that you might be forgiven, that you might be raised from the death of sin. He calls you to pay a costly price in return, that you give yourself away in sacrifice and love for Him. Peter followed the crucified and risen Christ, willing to walk the way that Christ had marked out for him, even to martyrdom. Your Lord will probably never ask as much of your love, but He does expect a willingness to follow wherever He leads. May His Holy Spirit give you this kind of love!

**MISERICORDIAS DOMINI,
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER
JESUS ASKS: DO YOU KNOW THE WAY?**

JOHN 14:1-6

The Propers for the Day

The name for this Sunday means "The goodness of the Lord." We've all experienced that goodness God has shown in the creation of this good earth, in our redemption from sin and death, and in the close fellowship with Him made possible through our self-sacrificing Good Shepherd and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The example of Christ in suffering and temptation is held up for us in the Epistle. As our Good Shepherd He will continue to be near us. Again and again we can confidently return to receive His goodness and guidance, no matter how we fail Him. (Imagine how Peter, the straying and restored sheep, must have felt as he wrote these words!)

Listen to the Good Shepherd's voice in the Gospel, pointing out that as He sacrificed Himself to bring us into God's flock, so a self-sacrificing spirit is required of us as we play the part of the good shepherd in leading others into His fold.

Our concern in the Collect that the joys of Easter will be everlasting for us is answered by the Lord's message to us in the sermon.

Introduction

Ann Landers, one of the most widely read newspaper columnists of our day, recently answered a question on religion by quoting a famous friend's comment on the subject: "The Lord doesn't care what floor you do your buying on—just so you shop at His store." It's a slight variation of the old misconception that "everyone is headed for the same place—we're just traveling different roads."

It's a misconception that can lead only to grief. If an error in your set of tour-guide

vacation maps leads you to travel hundreds of miles out of your way this summer, inconvenience and frustration may be the only result; but failure to find and follow God's way leads to something worse—the everlasting frustration and torments of hell.

Jesus is filled with loving concern for all potentially misdirected people.

Jesus Asks: Do You Know the Way?

I. Jesus Asks This Question to Keep You from Becoming Lost

A. He takes the initiative to come to you. He is the seeking Shepherd, who goes out to find the lost sheep. He doesn't wait for eager volunteers (Luke 9:57-58). He comes to draft those who will be His. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). With Isaiah we confess: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way" (Is. 53:6). Jesus comes to lead us back.

B. He makes it clear that He is your only way to the Father. The cry of Job still comes from the hearts of men today: "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" (Job 23:3). Amid confusion and sorrows God seemed to evade him. Along the way of our seeking we hear the voice of Christ: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). "I am the Door; if anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9). When you enter by that Door through faith, you find in the person of the Good Shepherd the way of direct access to the Father. Jesus doesn't merely say: "I'll show you the way as an example of the right kind of behavior" . . . or "Let Me tell you how to get there." He says: "I am the Way."

C. He offers you the only way of release from sin. There's no other way of release from the guilt and burden of sin except through God's forgiveness in Christ. Conscience nags and won't let us simply forget.

"My sin is ever before me," we have to say with David (Psalm 51:3). Psychiatrists may advise us to "talk it out"—to call the guilt up from the dark basement of our mind and look at it in the sunlight. That doesn't remove it or give us peace and wholeness. Our sin is always an offense against God, and only He can forgive it. Through His Son God opens the way to heal the hurt that sin has made and to restore us to His fellowship.

II. *Jesus Asks This Question to Keep You from Being Confused and Deceived*

A. As "the Truth" in human form He is the evidence that God always keeps His promises. Jesus doesn't say: "I think I can help you find out about God" or "I know something about God that will help make Him more plain to you." He says: "I am the Truth." There is no other truth about God except in Him. In Him we have assurance that there is no single promise that God has not kept. We have a faithful God (Deut. 7:9). You can depend on His Word. (Ps. 119:90)

B. This means you can be sure that His promise of life will come true. Jesus went before us to prepare our place with God. Because of Him our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Our stay in this world is like an overnight stay in a motel. He now intercedes for us before the Father (1 John 2:1). Our only hope for life with God now and forever rests on the fact that Christ is the very truth of God.

C. He invites you to believe and trust in Him because He is God's Truth. What does it mean to "believe in" Jesus? You are a group of people who claim to be "believers in Jesus." This means more than making up your mind that Jesus Christ is true God and true man. To believe in Christ means to be so thoroughly "sold" on Him that you are willing to risk your whole life in His cause. What He approves, you approve. What He hates, you hate.

III. *Jesus Asks This Question to Strengthen Your Hold on Him as Your Life*

A. Because of Christ, death can be described from one point of view as only a sleep, as St. Paul does in 1 Thess. 4:14. When He says, "I am the Life," He means life unending. "Because of Me, the crucified and risen Son of God, you will share in God's life now and forever." Christ holds the keys that He has wrested from death and hell. (Rev. 1:18)

B. Because of Christ, death has no power to separate. He promises: "Where I am, you may be also." As a member of the body of which Christ is the Head you can say: "Shall I fear, or could the Head Rise and leave His members dead?" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 206:2). His Word assures us that death cannot separate us from God (Rom. 8:38-39). Neither can it separate us from one another. (1 Thess. 4:17)

C. Because of Christ, death holds no fear for us. A child wakes up in the night afraid and begins to cry. He has his teddy bear and other toys, but the only answer that will quiet his fear is his mother's calm voice: "I'm here." In a world filled with the fear of death, Christ speaks to us: "I'm here—Let not your hearts be troubled."

We can respond:

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy
victory?

I triumph still if Thou abide with me.

(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 552:7)

Conclusion

Because Jesus is the Way for us, we are not lost in a confused maze of "highways to happiness" or a pathless existence that offers "no way out."

Because Jesus is the Truth, we are not lost in error and misunderstanding, left to our own speculation and guessing, stuck with the

notion that "truth is relative" and that one man's idea is about as good as another's.

Because Jesus is the Life, we are not lost in a world of death and dying, full of "memory gardens" and gravestones.

**JUBILATE, THE THIRD SUNDAY
AFTER EASTER**

JOHN 12:20-26

The Propers for the Day

You don't have to be a Latin student to know that joy and rejoicing is the meaning of the name of this Sunday. The day gets its name from the Introit's encouragement to "make a joyful noise to the Lord."

Sorrow and disappointment and all the other disturbers of joy are frequent visitors to us all. The Lord gives us no guarantee that we'll be immune from sadness. But nothing can take away the joy of our communion with Christ. This is the assurance He gives us in the Gospel.

In the Collect we ask for a life of consistent Christian behavior. We want God's help to steer clear of actions that would contradict our faith and the will to aim at doing that which will give evidence of what we believe.

The Epistle is an outline of practical Christian living that asks us to keep in mind that our primary citizenship, loyalty, and allegiance is a heavenly one. We live our life in this world as temporary visitors and need to be careful not to get too firmly attached to things that would interfere with our life of discipleship.

Introduction

As a Christian you have made it your aim in life to glorify God. But how is your aim this morning? Have you been hitting the target of glorifying God in your life? To help us improve our aim and sharpen our understanding of the life that glorifies Him,

our Lord comes to us with a searching question.

Jesus Asks: Will You Glorify Me?

I. Christ Is Glorified in You When You Rejoice in Him as Your Savior and Lord

A. Christ gave His life into suffering and death for you. He laid aside His heavenly glory to enter this world to become one of us. His life was a dying to the temptations of human nature; neither did He back away from real death. It came to Him as no accident. He clearly predicted it (Matt. 20: 18-19). The request of the Greeks who came to "see Jesus" was another sign that His time had now come. He would be glorified in His obedience to His Father's will, "obedient unto death—even death on a cross." He would be glorified in the redemption won for all people. He would be glorified when the Father exalted Him, giving Him a name above every name and seating Him at His right hand. He would be glorified in the work of the Holy Spirit as people are led to confess Him as Lord and Savior (John 16:14). He will be glorified as you acknowledge Him in faith.

B. Christ counted the cost and willingly paid it for your redemption. His picture of the grain of wheat is perfectly chosen to show the need for the Cross and the glory resulting from it. If a grain of wheat or corn is to produce any fruit, it must be planted in the ground to die and decompose. If it is not planted, it surely can bear no fruit. It remains barren. In the ground the process of germination begins, and abundant fruit is the result, one grain multiplying itself perhaps hundreds of times. Christ drank the bitter cup of suffering and death to atone for all sins of all men of all time. He went willingly to death for you.

C. Christ is glorified as you now confess Him as your Savior and Lord. When God showed His amazing love for men in giving His Son at Christmas, there was glory. When

Jesus revealed His divine power to forgive, to heal, and to save, there was glory. When He rose triumphant from the grave on Easter morning, there was a wonderful splendor. When you become part of the blessed fruit of His death and resurrection, there is great glory. When you honor and worship Him not just because of His model life but chiefly for the love that led Him to die in your behalf, He is glorified in you.

II. *Christ Is Glorified in You When You Follow Him as Disciple and Servant*

A. Being His disciple means following in His footsteps. You must walk the same way Christ walked. You must daily desire "to see Jesus" in His Word. You must day by day become more like Him. You can't expect any better treatment at the hands of the world than Christ Himself received. You must let Him identify you with Himself. (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 421:5)

B. Being His disciple means counting the cost and being willing to pay it. Christ wants not onlookers, but participants; not admirers, but martyrs; not mere churchgoers, but followers; not spectators, but all-out disciples. "A disciple is not above his teacher," He reminds you (Luke 6:40). That means both teacher and disciple have to count the cost and then be ready to pay the price, no matter how high.

C. Most people will say the value of an object is determined by the price you pay for it, but there's more to it than that. The value of some things lies in how you got them. Don't forget this when you put a value on your life. Does your everlasting life mean anything to you in terms of how you got it? Christ gave His life into death for you. To be His disciple is to put a new value on life and gladly to pay the price of that new life in your wholehearted commitment to Christ.

D. Being His disciple means self-denial and self-sacrifice. More is required than just giving up a few bad habits or changing the

routine of life for an hour on Sunday morning and perhaps one night a month. Christ demands a willingness to give up the very things you treasure most if they stand in the way of discipleship (Luke 14:26-33). Text, v. 25. Maybe you're thinking that this doesn't sound like Jesus and like His Gospel of love. You don't associate hatred of any kind with Christ. Hatred is a word that comes easily to us. "I hate broccoli." "I hate communism and what it stands for." "I hate to see the pain and misery caused by racial injustice." Christ is calling us to a hatred that arises not out of self-interest but out of self-denial. Like the athlete in training who must learn to hate certain foods and recreation which would interfere with his goal, so you must make every other affection, no matter how good, look like hatred in comparison to your love for Christ.

III. *Christ Is Glorified in You When You Lead Others to Share His Glory with You*

A. The abundant fruit of His death and resurrection is that salvation has been won for all men (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus saw in those Gentile Greeks who came to see Him only a small representation of that huge army of believers who would be brought into His kingdom after His resurrection. Through the preaching of His Gospel in all the world He now "draws all men to Himself" from all nations of people.

B. You are to take this message to others through your life of discipleship and service. This is part of the glory of being a disciple. You never get tired of thanking and praising God for the death and resurrection of Christ. You never tire of talking about Christ. You give credit for all that you are and all that you do to Christ, who lives in you. You make of your life a window through which others see Christ and glorify Him. When you see people around you with eyes and hearts still set upon the glory of this world, don't look

down on them, reject them, or shun them. Rather demonstrate what it means to have the glory of God in Christ Jesus in your life and help them to have it too.

Conclusion

Easter joy, the joy of knowing Christ as risen Savior and Lord and the joy of being His disciple, will not gradually fade away but increase and grow as we see others join us and follow us in glorifying our Savior.

CANTATE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JESUS ASKS: WILL YOU BE LOYAL?

JOHN 6:60-69

The Propers for the Day

"Oh, sing to the Lord a new song," today's Introit invites us and then reminds us that the reason for such is the marvelous salvation He has provided for us through His Easter victory.

James points us toward Pentecost in the Epistle, teaching us that the good gift of God's Holy Spirit comes to us through His divine Word of truth. Open your hearts to the Spirit's influence and let Him motivate you today so that your life may measure up to the title "firstfruits of His creation."

Jesus carefully explains that work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, making it clear that our continued close relationship with Him depends on this heavenly Counselor's working in us. The sermon challenges us to greater faithfulness to our Lord.

Introduction

"Do you have any reason to doubt this man's loyalty to his country?" That's one of the questions investigators ask about the person being considered for a position of trust in our government. Where national security is involved, loyalty to our country is of prime

importance. And a person's loyalty pledge is carefully checked against his attitudes and actions.

In a far more important sense, you have made a pledge of loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. You made it through your sponsors at your Baptism. At your confirmation you heard the pastor ask, "And do you intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and suffer everything, even death, rather than fall away from it?" You answered, "Yes, I do so intend with the help of God."

Because that promise of loyalty and faithfulness is often taken lightly and there are frequent obstacles to our keeping it,

Jesus Asks: Will You Be Loyal?

I. Loyalty to Christ Is a Necessary Part of Christian Discipleship

A. Jesus expects complete commitment to Him. There are no neutrals in the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:24). If you do not decide for Christ, you are lined up against Him. There are places along the northern border of the United States where it takes only one step to take you out of the United States into Canada. The actual change seems slight, yet the change is a big one. Across the border, you buy at Canadian prices, your conduct is subject to Canadian law, you are under the Canadian flag. With the step of faith the Holy Spirit has placed you in the kingdom of God. From the first step you are to go on in wholehearted dedication to your Lord.

B. Without such loyalty the blessings of discipleship may be lost. "Once saved — always saved" is a popular (and false) expression. The Bible describes the Christian life as a fight (1 Tim. 6:12, 20). It requires real effort (Rev. 3:11-12). You know some people, friends, relatives, who once professed faith in Christ but are no longer worshipping or serving Him. They "drew back and no longer went about with Him."

II. *Loyalty to Christ Is Based on the Fact that He Alone Is Worthy of the Highest Loyalty*

A. Jesus is the Son of God and Your Savior. Text, v. 62. Christ points to His coming exaltation and ascension as proof that He is God's Son; your life with God is dependent on Him. Text, v. 69. Peter was certain that Jesus was God in the flesh. That confidence did not weaken as years went by; instead it grew stronger. (1 Peter 1:18-21)

B. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:35,51). Real life is found only in Christ. Only in Him is there forgiveness for your sins and access to God and eternal life. As the "Holy One of God" He is able to do what He promises. He has accomplished the mission for which the Father sent Him—"to abolish death and bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Salvation can be yours through no one else. (Acts 4:12)

C. Jesus alone speaks to you the words that convey the life-giving Holy Spirit. Text, v. 63. "What I am saying to you conveys the power of the Holy Spirit." He uses these very words to lead you to understand and believe and receive the life of God.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded
Till Thy Spirit breaks our night
With the beams of truth unclouded.

(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 16:2)

The world offers many attractions but none that can meet our deepest needs. In spite of the amazing advances in technology, medicine, scientific research, human nature has not improved. Wars and "peace-keeping operations" which cost thousands of lives are still with us. Crime shows no noticeable decrease. The "space age" brings us closer to the moon, but it does little to bring us closer to each other in brotherly love and concern. All the world's material wealth has not been able to erase fear and hatred, prejudice and greed,

sorrow and grief. No advertiser offers "the finest money can buy" in spiritual things, because money can't provide peace with God, forgiveness for guilt, comfort in sadness, hope in death.

III. *Loyalty to Christ Will Be Tested*

A. Indifference and unbelief on the part of others may cause you to doubt. Text, v. 66. Christ's words were objectionable to some in the larger circle of the disciples. Not that they misunderstood. They were disturbed that He made eternal life entirely dependent on their faith in Him. This offended their personal pride and self-righteousness. It still does that today. There are still those who resent the role of empty-handed beggars before God. "I don't want a free ticket to heaven." Attitudes like these may raise doubts in your mind.

B. Unpopularity and persecution may stand in the way of your loyalty to Christ. Faithfulness demands that you cling to Christ's standards and values in the face of pressure to conform to others, that you always are concerned more about what Christ thinks of your actions and attitudes than about what others may say. In Nazi Germany during World War II there was a pastor who had eight children. The Gestapo informed him that if he did not stop the kind of preaching he was doing, he would endanger his own life and the lives of his family. He owed loyalty to Christ but also to his family. Didn't God expect him to protect his family? He continued his preaching and wound up spending eight years in various concentration camps, the fate of his family a continual worry, his own life always in danger. He chose to be loyal to Christ under trying circumstances (Matt. 10:37). You may never be faced with that kind of choice, but more subtle forms of persecution and ridicule may test your faithfulness. What happens to loyalty to Christ and His will when your action earns you the smug ridicule of your

neighbors, or threatens the loss of your job, or causes you to lose social standing?

C. Such tests of loyalty can be occasions for bold confession in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter's confident witness can be yours. "Lord, who else can offer us what we have found in You?" Paul Gerhardt, the "prince of German hymn writers," experienced some bitter persecution in his ministry because of his inflexible loyalty to Christ and Scriptural principles—at one time even being driven from his pulpit. Yet he could write this beautiful confession:

I will sing my Maker's praises,
And in Him most joyful be,
For in all things I see traces
Of His tender love to me.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 25:1)

Let your tests of loyalty to Christ be opportunities to take a clear and definite stand for Him. You know him by experience as your "Bread of Life," the Holy One of God, whose words have meant spirit and life for you. Now in the power of His Spirit be loyal to Him.

ROGATE, THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JESUS ASKS: WHY DON'T YOU PRAY?

LUKE 11:5-13

The Propers for the Day

Since the 6th century this Sunday has been known as "Pray Sunday." In prayer we commit to Christ all our concerns and needs that He may carry them to His heavenly Father.

"Practice what you preach" is the Epistle's admonition, and we need this reminder that our worship must take place not only in church but in day-by-day Christian living.

An open invitation to pray is given to each of us in the words of Christ in the Gospel as He encourages us to use His name to gain entrance to the Father's heart. Our failure to make frequent use of the blessed privilege of

talking to Him in prayer is what keeps our joy from being complete.

The sermon will guide us in thinking about our life of prayer especially in relation to the promises of God.

Introduction

Because you are a Christian, you pray. "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath"—one of those normal activities of the child of God, as normal as breathing. Well, how is your breathing this morning? Is your spiritual respiration what it should be?

Most of us are conscious of the fact that we don't pray enough, and often the prayers we pray are mechanical, set apart from the stream of life. When praying gets to be purely mechanical it is meaningless. Breathing is never mechanical except in an iron lung. Breathing is essential to life. You can't refuse to breathe and go on living. In the same way, under every circumstance of life, prayer is essential to faith and life with God. You can't neglect to pray and still go on believing and living the life of faith.

To help us examine our praying and to lead us to be more persistent and insistent in prayer, especially in regard to spiritual gifts,

Jesus Asks: Why Don't You Pray?

I. Jesus Expects His Disciples to Pray

A. You need to pray. Like the man in this illustration, you have times of real need, both physical and spiritual. Like an unexpected and unannounced guest, sorrow, trouble, and want may enter your home. Your Lord and Savior, the best Friend you'll ever have, knows what you need and how best to help. He is unlimited in His power and ability to help. As one who has been redeemed at great cost and rewon for the family of God, you need to make use of the divine resources available to you. Why try to "go it alone," depending on your own very limited resources of energy and knowledge

and spiritual strength, when the almighty Lord of earth and heaven is leaning down to listen to your prayers, when He is alert and ready to provide the help you need? If you lack spiritual power and vitality, if you are not as enthusiastic in confessing Christ as you ought to be, if your spiritual stature does not measure up to what God wants it to be, you need to pray.

B. Jesus teaches us to pray. The Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4) is the model Christ gives for our prayers, showing us a pattern and method of talking with God. Also by His own example of prayer Jesus shows that this is how we maintain our fellowship with the Father (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, John 17). Such a living, personal relationship requires communication.

C. God's great gift, the Holy Spirit, is given in response to your prayers. Text, v. 13. Every spiritual gift is wrapped up in the Holy Spirit. This is the one Gift of God you need most. With the Holy Spirit at work in you, you are God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16). He is at work in you to guide you into all truth (John 16:13); He glorifies Christ in you (John 16:14); He teaches you to pray the way you should (Rom. 8:26-27); He is your Counselor who empowers your life of witnessing for Christ. (John 15:26)

II. *Jesus Expects His Disciples to Be Persistent in Their Prayers for Spiritual Gifts*

A. Prayer requires persistence especially when spiritual blessings are involved. Text, vv. 5-9. Jesus illustrates the secret of perseverance. It was troublesome and inconvenient to get up in the middle of the night to accommodate even a good friend. The need was really not urgent. The late-arriving guest might have waited until morning. But because of the man's bothersome perseverance, his unwillingness to take "no" for an answer, the friend finally got up and gave him what he needed. Is Jesus suggesting such shamelessness in prayer? Yes! You can in-

sistently demand spiritual blessings from God because Christ has won them for you on the cross.

B. Prayer takes effort and exertion. Jesus urges us to become more intense and insistent in our prayers. Text, v. 9. Each of these verbs is more intense than the one that goes before, reminding us of the Lord's illustration. The friend in need first came to his neighbor's house, humbly asking for bread. When he got no response, he began to seek out his sleepy friend and repeated his request. Still getting no answer, he started knocking on the door, making such a disturbance that the friend was finally moved to answer his request. Although he seemed to be lacking in tact and courtesy, the man is held up for us as an example for our praying. Jacob (Gen. 32:24-26) and the woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:22-28) are other examples of persistent effort in prayer.

III. *Jesus Assures His Disciples that God Will Answer Such Prayers*

A. Christ promises this. Text, v. 9. "... it will be given you; . . . you will find; . . . it will be opened to you." "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matt. 21:22). Let this promise sink in. You and I do not pray as we should, not so much because of lack of time but because of lack of faith. We need to remember these promises of Christ so that in our prayers we can say, "Look, Lord, you promised!"

B. God the Father has demonstrated His willingness to answer in the gift of His Son to be our Savior. In your prayers remember that God is more than a friend who gives help to his bothersome neighbor just to "get rid of him" and to keep from being disturbed any longer. God is your Father who has shown His amazing love for you in the life and death of His Son. Having taken care of your greatest need in the forgiveness and new life He provides through Christ, He will certainly take care of your other spiritual and

physical needs (Rom. 8:32). When you look at the cross and think of all that God has done for you there, how can you help but pray with confident trust? Christ is your guarantee that God is your loving Father.

C. God the Father will keep on sending the Holy Spirit. Text, vv. 11-13. No matter how sinful earthly parents may be, they do not answer their children's request for food by giving them things that would be useless, harmful, or deadly. In love they provide the nourishing food children need to remain healthy and well. Parents are not perfect, yet with all their failings they would not deliberately harm their own sons and daughters. Our perfect heavenly Father makes no mis-

takes. He cannot give us anything that would be hurtful to us. Rather, He wants to give the best possible gift in answer to our prayers, His Holy Spirit. This is the gift we need most for our spiritual health and well-being. (Eph. 5:18-20)

Conclusion

What are you waiting for? Don't hold God's willingness and power to answer prayer at arm's length by failing to pray. Take God up on His promises, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit will be evident in your life.

Cullman, Ala.

HAROLD G. HERMETZ