

NOT YEARLY BREAD BUT DAILY BREAD

(The homily below was preached by Msgr. McHenry nine years ago.
There was a missionary priest who preached at all the Masses this week.)

A couple of months back I got together with a couple of my ecumenical friends, Pastor Charles Quann of Bethlehem Baptist and Rabbi Greg Marx of Congregation Beth Or. A couple of times a year we try to get together for a lunch to just talk and enjoy each other's company. We met at the William Penn Inn because I had a few gift certificates. We genuinely like and appreciate each other and find it relatively easy to talk about our concerns or struggles in the ministry, about relationships and weariness.

Both Pastor Quann and Rabbi Marx were talking about how their spouses also serve as a kind of confidante for them about matters of their church or congregation and how they value that relationship. But they both mentioned that because their spouses are members of the congregation and because some things that a pastor or rabbi learn are confidential, some things cannot be shared with their spouses. This can become a delicate area if their spouse senses there is a holding back, because marriages are very sensitive on that point. Both spoke about how they tried to get that part of their relationship just right. Not having a spouse they asked of me how I dealt with these kinds of demands in ministry.

From seminary days we are trained in a different fashion especially in how we are to take these kinds of matters right into our prayer. I spoke of how I pray each morning and how that prayer comes rather readily to me but that I have to fight against the lethargy of the other end of the day when I have little energy left and little desire to continue to expend myself. I have come to learn that the end of my day is just as important as the beginning of my day. I spoke of having a chapel in the rectory right next to my bedroom. I can simply go into chapel, close the door, and am immediately in the presence of my Lord. There are times when I give myself to the formal prayers that are my responsibility to pray. There are other times when, in my weariness, I simply speak to the Lord and ask for the Lord to hold me. And the Lord does hold me. And that can be fifteen or even twenty minutes. And that is prayer, although I say nothing and am simply content to be.

When I mentioned being held like that both of my confreres were gentle with me because they recognized the truth of what I was sharing. I looked at Rabbi Marx and his face said that he was not familiar with doing something like what I had just described nor had he ever done anything like that himself. Later on, as I reflected and pondered on the conversation of that lunch I began to realize that it is precisely because of my relationship with Jesus that I have this sense of how God could and would actually hold me. "The Father and I are one." "He who sees me sees the Father." And, "No one can come to the father except through me." Notice that Jesus does not say that no one can come to God except through me. There are always avenues that enable us to get to God in this life. What Jesus is saying is that no one can get to the point where they have a relationship with God as Father except through him, the beloved Son. To have such a relationship comes only through Jesus.

"Lord, teach us to pray...." You know how Jesus responds to that request. "When you pray say 'Father....'" The passage we read from Luke's gospel today is not the form of the Lord's Prayer that we memorize and commit to memory as children. That version comes from the gospel of Matthew. But both are from the Lord. Jesus adds to what he teaches about how they are to pray. He adds: "Ask...seek...knock." And you will receive...find...enter." The

trouble with what Jesus adds is that there are times when we do ask and we don't receive, we do seek and we do not find, we do knock but the door remains barred to us. What then?

That experience got me thinking about Jesus' own prayer. Just in the week before he dies, there are several occasions when he prays. He sits on the hill across from Jerusalem. "Jerusalem, O Jerusalem! If only you had known of the time of your visitation." But Jerusalem didn't know and Jerusalem kills the Messiah. Jesus says to Simon Peter on the night of his betrayal, "Simon I have prayed for you because Satan desires you." But Simon Peter then goes out and denies he even knows Jesus at all. And finally, there is Jesus prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, take this cup away from me." But the cup is not taken away and Jesus drinks the cup to the dregs. It costs him everything he is and everything he has. What about those prayers and the non-answering of them? But Jerusalem is not destroyed. It stands even to this day as the center of the three major faiths in the world—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is not yet the city of peace. And while Simon Peter falls short in that moment he eventually regains his equilibrium, becomes the Big Fisherman and ultimately dies on the cross in the Amphitheatre in Rome although crucified upside down because he does not deem himself worthy of dying as his master died. And Jesus? He has been raised from the tomb, nevermore to die. He reigns in glory forever. Those prayers were heard. Jesus asked and received. He did not receive only what he asked for or precisely what he asked for. But that is not what he says to us. He does not say "Ask and you will receive everything you ask for." He says only that we will receive. He is asking us then to trust his Father, that his Father knows what we really need and is going to give us what we really need, not a snake when we need a fish. We are to trust as we pray and to be on the lookout for how God answers our prayer.

The key for me is the expression: Daily bread. I must pray daily as I must sleep daily and I must eat daily. If I am sleep-deprived then I cannot really function and if I am prayer-deprived then I cannot function then either. I must pray each day. Daily bread. And not simply pray for the resolution of all my troubles. I must pray for what I need to get me through this day not all my days. For some of what we pray for can only be accomplished over time. Hearts to change. Forgiveness to be offered. Memories to be healed. Pray this day and then tomorrow pray for that day. Your prayer will change your heart and bring you into harmony with God. It is not that our prayer softens God's heart. Your prayer will enable you to see how God answers your prayer. Give God the time. Trust the Lord. Believe you are heard. He is your loving Father. Not everyone has been led to that truth. But we have.