Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“When I called, you answered me” (Psalm 138:3).

Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Matt 7:7-12

The Book of Esther was probably a Persian tale from the exile period before Cyrus sent the Jews home to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. It reflects the precarious status of the Hebrew community during the exile, but also shows how God protected them from harm. Queen Esther's heartfelt prayer makes it an appropriate match with today's Gospel about Jesus' assurance that God hears and answers every prayer.

This assurance focuses not just on the invitation to ask, seek and knock in times of need but also on the nature of God's love for us. If we know and trust God as a loving *Abba* who always responds to his children's needs, we will not turn prayer into a 9-1-1 call for help in an emergency instead of an intimate turning to Someone we already know and have a loving relationship with.

Prayer is integral to our faith in God., and cultivating this intimacy is part of discipleship. Jesus did not want his disciples to have a formal or fearful regard for God as a judge who had to be approached based on merit but experienced as an attentive parent who automatically cares for his children. If human parents feed and provide for the safety of their children, why wouldn't the heavenly *Abba* be infinitely more concerned about us?

Jesus' description of prayer is instructive and addresses some of people's mistaken notions about how prayer works. First, prayer is a process, not an instant wish list. A prayerful person is always seeking, asking and knocking. These three activities suggest different strategies requiring persistence based on the confidence that we will succeed because God wants us to receive what we need in the best way possible.

A seeker refines his search, trying different paths, proceeding step by step. His prayer changes, becomes deeper, more inclusive. The one who asks may be surprised to learn that she has been asking the wrong question, or too small a question, or that the answer is "no," because what she wants is not what she really needs. Those who knock learn to keep knocking. God is there, so persist and prepare for an encounter.

Prayer is a mystery that draws us closer to the mystery of God, who loves us more than we can imagine and is constantly seeking ways to reveal that love. In the end, prayer is only secondarily about things or safety or health or whatever we need in this life. Every prayer gives us a glimpse of God and a preview of the divine embrace that awaits us in the Beloved Community emanating from the Trinity. Prayer

enables us to enjoy the end of the story Jesus revealed by his resurrection. Jesus is alive, and this is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise that our own prayers will be answered.

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