

1. The man who went to his friend in the middle of the night for three loaves to feed a visitor (Lk.11)
2. The widow whose persistence ensured that a judge finally granted justice to her (Lk.18).

## The Efficacy of Prayer

Despite all that Jesus taught about prayer, our own experiences tell us that prayer is often not answered in the way **we want**. Sometimes we feel short-changed after we pray. Also, how does Jesus' guarantee "**Ask and it shall be given ..**"



equate with God's Will? This question is posed in the question 'Can Prayer Bribe God?'. In other words, how can our prayers really give us what **we want** if this is contrary to God's Will? Therefore, 'How can prayer really be effective?'

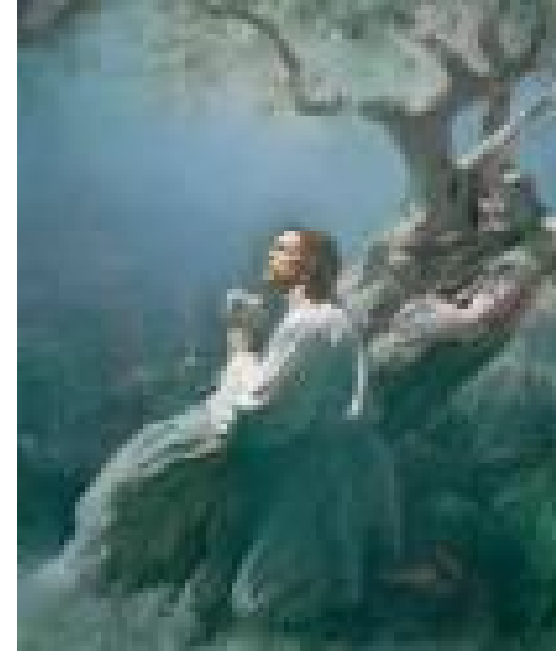
There are really no problems about prayer. Our prayers are **always** effective, **always** answered for our good. We are told to pray because prayer makes us aware of our dependence on God's goodness. It is a sign of our love of God. Genuinely humble prayer demonstrates our trust and confidence in God. We know in our hearts that God's Will can not be changed by our prayer, **but our prayer is meant to run parallel with His Will**. We must always be prepared to accept whatever is God's Will, and trust that **whatever happens really does have a MUCH greater dimension than our individual preferences, more than what WE think the outcome of our prayers should be**.

This is the lesson we see in Jesus' own prayer to the Father before his death. Perhaps **Jesus' example** is his greatest teaching to us on prayer.

Knowing his time had come, and despite knowing what was going to happen, Jesus **still** prayed to the Father that things might be changed: "**Father, for you everything is possible, take this cup from me**". Yet, despite his human fear of suffering, Jesus showed his complete trust in the Father and acceptance of his Will. Are we also able to say and mean it: "**But let it be as you, not I, would have it**" (Mk. 14).

## Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

### 9. What Did Jesus Teach About Prayer?



1. What are the qualities Jesus associated with authentic prayer?
2. What is the point of perseverance in prayer when God's Will can not be changed?
3. Does Jesus' teaching about the need to be child-like help us understand prayer better?

## Jesus and Petitionary Prayer

As a Jew, Jesus knew that Old Testament prayer consisted of Praise and Adoration of God, Penance, Thanksgiving, and Petition to him. This range of prayer is clearly seen in the Jewish Psalms. However, when Jesus talks about the proper dispositions for prayer and how we should pray, he nearly always speaks in the context of petitionary prayer. This is so even in the 'Our Father'. We must ask ourselves, why was this, particularly given that this type is generally self-centred prayer and, therefore, less perfect than other prayers that seek to place God first.

To answer that question we must place in the forefront of our minds God's infinite love for us. In the Old Testament, God made a series of Covenants or agreements with his chosen people that gave them assurance about his protection and kindness to them. This assurance is even more guaranteed in the final Covenant of the New Testament for all those who have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, as Saviour. Indeed, our communion with the Trinitarian God makes us adopted children and that gives us the confidence to ask of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whatever it is will further our spiritual journey.



All of Jesus' teachings on prayer are based on God's love for us, a love that requires, in turn, humility, complete trust and confidence, and perseverance on our part. This is what Jesus teaches repeatedly.

### Humility

Jesus stated (Mtt.6) that our prayers should be said in private without any ostentatious displays that are really intended to impress others:

**“Do not imitate the hypocrites who love to say their prayers .. for people to see them .. but when you pray go to your private place .. and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you”**

A proper humble disposition requires that we recognise ourselves as coming to God in our nothingness, that we are all sinners. This is demonstrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

**“God be merciful to me a sinner”** (Lk.18).

On several occasions Jesus referred to the importance of being child-like in our faith (Mtt.18), but especially when he said **“Anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it”** (Lk.18). This stresses the need for an unassuming attitude.

### Trust and Confidence

It is easy to get drawn into the worries about life; we have all been there at some time or other. Yet Jesus tells us not to be worried about earthly things **“I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat .. surely life is more than food .. Look at the birds of the sky, they do not sow or reap but your heavenly Father feeds them .. Will he not much more look after you, you who have little faith? Set your hearts on the kingdom first and all these will be given you as well”** (Mtt.6).

Jesus is even more reassuring when he said:

**“Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you .. If you, evil as you are, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask?”** (Mtt.7).

### Perseverance

There are two parables Jesus told to emphasise the need to persevere in prayer:

