

What is needed for prayer? Prayer is a key part of the Christian life, something we are both commanded to do and privileged to do every day. But what goes into it? In our Gospel lesson today, we are taught by God about prayer, with a blind beggar being our example in three wonderful ways.

The first thing we learn about prayer is that prayer must be done in faith. If you think about it, the beggar had to rely on faith, because he was blind. He had to trust in the word he was told. At some point earlier on, and maybe several times before, this blind beggar had apparently heard about Jesus. He'd heard that this Jesus from Nazareth was capable of doing great things, working miracles by the power of God. And so in faith, the man believes that Jesus can do the same for him.

In addition to this, he'd heard that this Jesus wasn't just a miracle worker, or even a prophet, but was claiming to be the Messiah, the long-awaited Redeemer of God's people. That's why he cries out to Jesus as the Son of David; he is confessing his faith that Jesus is the Messiah.

There's one more thing that this man takes on faith, something I admit I didn't notice right away but that is absolutely critical. He has to believe that Jesus is there! Again, he's blind. He hears a crowd coming by and all its noise. But he can't look to see who it is. He has to ask what's going on, and is told by others, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He can't prove it. Jesus' disciples aren't calling out "Make way for Jesus, the Son of David!"

Perhaps this beggar could think that people are just messing with him. Or maybe he figures that it's too good to be true, that there's no way the actual Messiah could be within earshot of him. But those doubts and any others are overcome by faith. This man has faith that Jesus is there and can hear him, that Jesus has the power to heal him, and that Jesus has come to bring healing and restoration, and that faith leads him to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Faith is what the prayers of a Christian are grounded in as well. We hear in Romans 10 that, in order to call on God – pray to Him – you first have to believe in Him. Hebrews 11 teaches this as well: "For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists." This just makes sense; a prayer can't be sincere if it's speaking to a God you don't actually think is there.

It's a popular trope in movies and TV shows and such, the character saying "God, I don't know if you're there, but if you are, could you just... fill in the blank." That might tug at our heartstrings, but such a prayer isn't one that's actually considered by the Lord. Like the blind beggar, you have to believe that God is real, and is who He says He is in His word, and is actually present. Can you see Him, as you see me or the person next to you in the pew? No! That's why prayer is an act of faith.

The next lesson we learn about prayer from this reading is that our prayers rely totally on the mercy of God. What is the repeated cry of the beggar? "Son of David, have mercy on me!" He is asking God to have mercy. Now, maybe that seems totally obvious – of course he asks for mercy.

But put yourself in his shoes and think about how you might be tempted to address Jesus in his situation. Maybe you'd be tempted call out in anger, or entitlement. "Why have you put me through this? What did I do to deserve this blindness? This isn't fair, Jesus, and so you better fix it!" Or perhaps you'd be tempted to bargain. "Son of David, if you heal me, then I promise I'll follow you and tell everyone you were the one who healed me and get other beggars to follow you too."

The blind beggar does neither of these things. He simply cries out to God for mercy. Mercy is undeserved kindness, shown purely out of love. It's compassion on another. By calling out for mercy, the man is confessing that he doesn't deserve Jesus to work a miracle for him, nor has he anything to offer to Jesus in exchange for healing. Rather, he simply believes that Jesus is the God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He believes that Jesus is the God who is love and who in love will desire to restore him, to do what is best for him.

The mercy of God is what we ground our prayers in as well. We do this, not simply because the Bible tells us to – though that would be reason enough – but because it is the only thing that is sufficient to ensure our prayers are heard.

Think about the alternatives. Perhaps I'm tempted to anger, like if the beggar had said it wasn't fair what had happened to him and he deserved to be healed. If I try to accuse God of being unfair, unjust, am I ever going to win that argument? Will the Lord of heaven and earth sit on His glorious throne and say, "Oh, whoops, I did kinda overlook that, sorry about that."? Of course not! God is the God who is perfect in knowledge, wisdom, and justice. Because I'm a sinner who rebels against God, the only thing I deserve is His punishment. The wages of sin is death.

Or maybe I think that I could bargain with God. Another popular trope when it comes to prayer in media and entertainment. "God, if you do this or that, I promise that I'll never be bad again/get my life together/give half my lottery winnings to the church/etc." God can't be bribed. Nor does He actually need anything. Paul points this out when witnessing in Athens, saying of God, "nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." Everything, including our very lives, already belongs to God. So we have nothing to offer Him.

Yet while these things fall short, the mercy of God is infinite. His love is boundless. It goes almost beyond words. Almost, because He does tell us about it in His word. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." God's mercy toward us is so great that it causes Him to bring us back from spiritual death and make us alive once more.

And how did the Lord do this? By sending His only Son to die for us. The Father's mercy is so great that it caused Him to give up His own Son for us. And the Son loves us so much that He willingly, gladly did so, offering Himself as the great sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. God the Holy Spirit, equal in majesty, glory, and power to the Father and the Son, chooses in mercy to dwell within us. I can guarantee you that your worldly net worth is nowhere near what Solomon's temple would've been valued at, but in mercy God has chosen to make you His temple.

Therefore, when you pray, you aren't praying to a god who is sitting in heaven, asking "What can you do for me in exchange for this request?" No, you are praying to a God who has uniquely created you, who has died for you, and who now lives inside you – none of it because you or I deserve it; all because He delights in showing mercy to us. Since He was willing and glad to do all this, He is willing and glad to do whatever He knows is best for us!

From faith and mercy flows the third thing this lesson teaches us about prayer, namely, to pray boldly. The blind beggar cries out to Jesus for mercy, believing Him to be the Son of God. And when the people tell him to be quiet, what does he do? He cries out all the more!

Maybe they were trying to silence him out of fear of the Romans, who might think Jesus is being hailed as an earthly king and therefore a potential insurrectionist to be violently crushed. Or maybe they're scared of the ruling Jewish religious authorities, who have declared that anyone who confesses Jesus to be the Messiah will be thrown out of the temple, cut off from polite society. Perhaps the residents of Jericho are trying to stay on the good side of the authorities, civil or religious.

Or maybe they just find the guy annoying, an embarrassment to their community as they welcome this famous rabbi from Nazareth. But whatever the cause is, the man doesn't care. In boldness, he's going to call out to Jesus, regardless of what anyone tells him.

He shows still more boldness in his request to Jesus. Acting as a king, Jesus halts the procession and invites the man over, asking, "What do you want me to do for you?" This could've been a time where the man could've waffled, or been too embarrassed to ask, or in false humility asked for something minor. Or he could've thought that the answer was so obvious that it must be a trick question.

But he believes that this is the Messiah, God in flesh, who loves him, and so he swings for the fences: "Lord, let me recover my sight." He asks for something beyond the ability of earthly physicians or kings, or even the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. But he knows that the Scripture has foretold that the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind, and so he asks the Messiah to do that for him.

And what happens? "Jesus said to him, 'Recover your sight.' And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God." Jesus had done the impossible for him, and in thanksgiving he praises God and follows Jesus.

This is the boldness that we are directed toward in our own prayers. We might have many different voices trying to silence our own prayers. Maybe outside of us, or maybe inside, our own doubts, our sinful flesh trying to keep us from calling out to the Lord. Yet in the boldness that comes from faith, we can ignore all these voices, because in prayer we are calling out to the God who loves us and desires to hear our prayers.

Faith also leads to boldness in what we ask. Sometimes you might be tempted to think that you're asking for too much, or too great a thing, and so you back off the request, maybe asking for something smaller, or something that would get you part of the way to what you want and then you'll figure the rest out on your own. Don't let these thoughts stop or limit your prayers! Instead, pray in

boldness! Let the Lord know what you need, even if it seems as obvious or as impossible as the beggar's request.

Let His word guide your prayers, both concerning what you should and shouldn't pray for, and also showing the confidence you can have in your prayers. He tells us in His word that He is able to do far more than we either ask or even think; so pray accordingly!

You are praying to the God who made the entire universe from nothing, who formed all of creation in six days – He's more than powerful enough to do what you need. You are praying to the God who willingly hung on a cross and endured the wrath of hell for you – you're not going to trouble or inconvenience Him. You are praying to the God who knows the innermost thoughts of your heart and mind – you can be honest with Him.

If He knows that what you're asking for isn't what's truly best, or now isn't the right time, then He won't grant it – which is best for you. But if you are asking for something that He knows is good for you, then He will grant it, because He loves you and wants what's best – eternally best – for you, and nothing will be able to stop Him from giving you such a thing!

As you follow Christ, remember that He has blessed you as He blessed the blind beggar. He has given you faith. He has given you mercy. He has given you boldness. Pray in these things, and know that He hears and will answer.

In the name of Jesus, amen.