

- “...amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.”
- Sounds like a pretty good deal on its face. But who among us has prayed—even in groups—and NOT received? Many, if not most of us.
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- First of all, in Jesus’ statement there is the assumption that those requesting in prayer are in God’s grace and favor...remembering the healed blind man in John’s Gospel saying: “*We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.*” (John 9:31)
- In Catholic parlance, that means that it is when we are in the state of grace that God hears and heeds us, not while we are in serious and mortal sin...which, by definition, separates us from God—by our own choice. Sin, by definition, is not involuntary.
- This is one reason it is so vital to avoid serious and mortal sin...to go to confession as soon as possible when we fall into it...for to be separated from God is the worst of all possible fates.
- And we read in the book of Job: “...*what is the hope of the godless when he is cut off...Will God hear his cry, when distress comes upon him?*” (Job 27:8-9)

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- Secondly, we have to consider what we are praying for. Is it for selfish purpose? Will someone else be harmed if our prayer is granted? Will it result in the good?
 - As we read from St. James’ letter: “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*” (James 4:3) ...which recalls St. Peter: “...*live...no longer by human passions but by the will of God.*” (1 Peter 4:2)
 - So...if you prayed to win the lottery, or prayed to get Betsy’s job regardless of how she might be impoverished, don’t be surprised if you didn’t get it...regardless of how much you promised to give to the Church and to the poor.

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- A third point is that we must ask with faith in God’s goodness and providence, as St. James also says: “...let [the pray-er] ask in faith, with no doubting...For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.” (James 1:6-8)
 - This verse can apply in many contexts, but it might be pointed particularly at those who sway in-and-out of their practice of the faith, depending on convenience rather than devotion.
 - Thus, a constant and steadfast practice of the faith is necessary.

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- Finally, and perhaps most importantly: Is what we request within the will of God?
 - Above all things, we need pray that our wills be conformed to His, not His to ours...as Jesus in the Garden gives example before His passion in His prayer: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)

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- Thus fidelity to God through obedience to His Word and commandments, and selflessness and active faith. If we want to be sure to be heard, these are essential...which is no more than to simply to be a faithful Christian...a faithful Catholic.
 - As Jesus declares in John’s Gospel: “Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither...[but] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.” (John 15:6-7)

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- The stress in our readings today focus upon the first condition for our prayers to be heard—obedience to the Word of God. Disregarding His Word leads not only to unanswered prayers, but exclusion from Him.
 - Knowing the importance of obedience, the warning of God to Ezekiel rings in the ears of the Church’s ministers, who should

constantly ask themselves: *“Am I being faithful to God, or simply bowing to the standards of the world? Do I fear “upsetting” people rather than preach the truth? Will I be condemned by those words of the Gospel: “...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”?* (John 12:43)

- That very often means explicitly rejecting common culture, which in our day focuses upon satisfying the passions of the flesh more than the will of God.
- Always God, first and foremost. The great commandments: Love God above all else, and your neighbor as yourself. This is what is truly good and right.
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- You parents have this responsibility even more so, because you shepherd and guide your children every day.
- What your children see in you will be echoed more-or-less throughout their lives. In many ways, they will become you...and thus you must become what you want them to be.

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- Certainly it would be much easier for the Church to go along with the world...bypassing mention of sin and issues that make people uncomfortable—abortion, any sex outside of valid marriage of man and woman only, marriage and remarriage outside of the Church, birth control, etc.,...but always in the watchman’s ears are those words of God to Ezekiel: *“...if you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way...I will hold YOU responsible for his death.”*
 - And we also remember St. James: *“...whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”* (James 5:19-1)

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- So let us not only hear and accept...but embrace with all our strength the teaching of Christ and His Church, and impart it to all around us by our words and example...knowing that through the Church and with her, God gives us the words—and the promise—of eternal life.

Reading 1

[Ez 33:7-9](#)

Thus says the LORD:

You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel;
when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.

If I tell the wicked, “O wicked one, you shall surely die,”
and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way,
the wicked shall die for his guilt,

but I will hold you responsible for his death.

But if you warn the wicked,
trying to turn him from his way,
and he refuses to turn from his way,
he shall die for his guilt,
but you shall save yourself.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9](#)

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
Where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works.”

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading II

[Rom 13:8-10](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another;

for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, namely,

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love does no evil to the neighbor;
hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Gospel

[Mt 18:15-20](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:

“If your brother sins against you,
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.

If he does not listen,

take one or two others along with you,

so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.

If he refuses to listen even to the church,
then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

Amen, I say to you,

whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again, amen, I say to you,

if two of you agree on earth

about anything for which they are to pray,

it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.”