

## Sermon Luke 11:1-11

Someone said: Prayer is like flossing your teeth. You know its a good thing to do and you should probably be doing it better .

92% of people say they pray, yet only 86% say they believe in God

Well what is prayer? That's what Jesus disciples felt the need to ask Jesus about in today's gospel reading.

There are many types of prayer some taught to help people pray better. Ignatian Prayer, Centering Prayer, intercessory Prayer, contemplative prayer, prayers of petition, the Rosary, and many more. You can sign up for courses to learn how to do some of them. A usual definition of what prayer is, is that it is *the raising of the mind and heart to God*. Children are often taught to pray by kneeling down, closing their eyes and folding their hands. I have memories of kneeling on the grand stairs of my convent school at 2pm every school day to say the rosary, and praying before and after every lesson. And more recently, chanting and meditating with Buddhist monks, and through that feeling a deep sense of - well *something*.

Today's gospel has Jesus giving clear advice to a disciple asking how to do prayer right, as right as John the Baptist's disciples were known to have done it, which seems to be the goal they were aiming to match.

He doesn't just reply with a pattern of prayer – with what we call the Lord's Prayer – but wants them to understand this isn't just about how should we pray through patterns of prayer, but more about how to engage with God—which is the essence of what prayer is and means.

Some of His guidelines are illustrated through telling a parable, and right in the middle of this parable, Jesus says something that we are all probably too familiar with “*So I say*

*to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

Essentially, Jesus tells his disciples be persistent, be bold, be audacious. Keep at it. Come to God with the expectation that God will hear you and God will answer you. Come believing that it is not presumptuous to interact with God, because that is exactly what we need to do and are invited to do.

But we might not always feel we are doing it *right*. After all, the disciples said *teach us to pray,*” in other words, we don’t feel we know how to talk to God. What is it OK to ask God for? How should we pray? How can we get God to give us what we ask? What if we don’t get granted what we pray for or about – are we doing it wrong? Praying for wrong things or doing it wrong.

Well a good maxim to go by is that *God knows best*. We might pray for something earnestly, and it gets answered in a different way from what we had thought was the right way. How often does that happen, and we then realize God provided a better outcome than we thought was the right one. And so Jesus says God will answer you as a father answers a child, knowing what’s best for you.

How often do we worry - like flossing our teeth - that we just haven’t done it right? No wonder we haven’t got the right result. Remember – Jesus said it isn’t so much about how you pray, as the communion and closeness you seek and find in being with God.

What might that look like? How might that be reached and rested in?

Anne Lammott one of the most grounded and faithful Christian pilgrims in our time says: *“the best 2 prayers I know are Thank you Thank you Thank you, and Help me Help me Help me. When you're done with ‘thank you’, you may take a long, quavering*

*breath and say, 'Help' People say 'help' without actually believing anything hears that. But it is the great prayer, and it is the hardest prayer, because you have to surrender, which is the hardest thing any of us do, ever."*

So there are set prayers, like we find in prayer books, and short made up prayers like Anne Lammotts. How else do we pray? An English bishop says his best praying is done walking his dog on the beach.

Some people pray by *doing*. Cisterian monks pray by gardening and growing crops and produce. We heard in last week's gospel that Jesus told the sisters Martha and Mary that it was as blessed for one of them to do the housekeeping and provide hospitality as for the other to just sit at His feet and listen to His teaching, because both are done raising their minds and hearts to God. And remember that hymn Teach Me my God and King:

Teach me, my God and King,  
in all things thee to see,  
and what I do in anything  
to do it as for thee.....

A servant with this clause  
makes drudgery divine:  
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,  
makes that and the action fine.

How do you pray? In church? In your car? Walking round the grocery store? (Walmart is good for that, I find, with long wide aisles). In bed when you wake up? Or before you turn out the light? Sitting on the bus? At work? Every time I get into my car I say "Please God take care of me".

Like flossing your teeth, do you do it better some times than others? I did some good praying these past 2 weeks myself. If you read FF you know I've been the priest at a

church with no incumbent where I've been asked to serve stints there over the past 6 years. It starts with opening 14 doors every morning at 7am, and locking them up again at 7pm, saying morning prayer with the church administrator, recording the Sunday service and the sermons I've written to go online, then doing them all over again live on Sundays; this past time conducting 2 weddings in 5 days, with all that involves with rehearsals and musicians and writing sermons for both; and setting up their Taize service, lighting 25 candles charging the incense and holy water stoops; holding pastoral conversations with people in need. Busy - but blessed, giving it all to God. Having as my prayer mantra all the while: *And what I do in anything, I do it as for thee*. Praise prayer, and thank you prayer.

Give it to God is what a dear priest friend of mine says of all things he does and thinks, both good and challenging, especially as he longs for resolutions to big challenges at the moment. Thanking and asking and persisting boldly, and trusting God is listening. How do you pray? However you do it, trust that it is right and OK. And God will be listening. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened...

Trust that God is going to give you everything you need to get through this life. Ask Him boldly for the things you need as you depend on Him. He is not going to give you a scorpion when you need an egg. God will give you the Holy Spirit. Do not try to make this mystical and strange. It is a simple promise made repeatedly through the scriptures. God is going to give you his blessings when you ask. What do you truly need right now? Ask God. Shamelessly be persistent in your request to the God who gives you every good gift and perfect blessing for your life.

And more words of wisdom from real life from Anne Lammott: *"Amen is how most of us end our prayers, the standard response to prayers in the synagogue and the church and the mosque. The word means: And so it is, or Truly. Well, that's very nice, but what on*

*earth does it mean? What is? The people praying are the ones saying Amen, It is us, the damaged, hopeless people, lifting up our hope, hate, gratitude, fear, and shame, saying, Boy, do we hope we are right about this God stuff."*

AMEN