

24th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C” *Imploring the Lord in hope and trust.*
September 14-15, 2013
Readings: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-32

Moses is indeed one of the most towering figures in the Old Testament. Today’s passage from Exodus signals the depth of his prayers on behalf of the people. He literally intercedes for his people out of love and God relents in the punishment that he had threatened towards the people. If you have you ever doubted the efficacy of intercessory prayer- re-read this passage!

The Church’s understanding of the Communion of Saints is based upon a fervent belief in the power of intercessory prayer. **God knows what we desire before we ask him.** He did not need to hear Moses interceding for the people; He knew what was in his heart. However, He awaited his petition because the dignity of God’s children lies in their freedom. Do you pray with His spirit of freedom? It is the only way to truly know what Gods wants, for it may be quite different from what we desire.

A 4th century monk named Evagrius reminded his readers:

“Do not be troubled if you do not immediately receive from God what you ask him; for he desires to do something even greater for you, while you cling to him in prayer.”¹

When we do not receive from God that which we desire, we may respond in frustration, in bewilderment or even anger. We respond with cries of “This is unfair,” “God has abandoned me,” or “God is uninvolved in the lives of His people.” In our lives, especially in times of difficulty, the feeling of abandonment can be very real and very painful. The questions that begin with the word *why* are often the most common and the most troubling.

¹ Evagrius Ponticus, *De Oratone* 34: PG 79, 1173

In these times, we must reach out both to God and to others. We rely on the intercession of others because it draws us more closely together in a spiritual bond of communion and friendship. This holds true both with respect to the living as well as the dead, the saints in heaven. The Church in its fullness includes members in three states: those of us on earth, those who have preceded us and are with God in heaven, and the beloved dead who, having been counted among the saved, are yet being purified before receiving the beatific vision.

This Communion of Saints is profitable both for us and those in purgatory, for it would be a foolish thing to pray for the dead if we did not believe that those prayers were efficacious for them.² We have every reason to believe that God's saints, more closely united to Him, are able to exercise their charity and intercession on our behalf by fixing the Church more firmly in holiness.

The intercession of Moses on behalf of his people is a sure sign of his love for the flock entrusted to his care and a concrete realization of his duty towards them. Like a loving Father, he sticks up for the interests of his children, even as he calls them to greater holiness and to a conversion of life from their sinful ways. Too many times we are guilty of fashioning our own *golden calves*, our perceived measures of security that only turn out to be false and illusory.

We run to and fro searching for happiness, too often in ways and manners that cannot lead to lasting peace. Here, the parable of the lost sheep makes its entrance into our own lives. We must be able to recognize honestly in ourselves both the sense in which we are lost and searching, as well as the comfort from knowing that God is seeking after us. He will never abandon the search, even when it

² cf. *2 Maccabees* 12:45. See also Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* para. #50

seems illogical to do so.

Have you ever stopped to think of forgiveness from God's perspective? Not only in terms of the fact that we are not really worthy to keep being forgiven, but in the sense of how much joy God feels at the return of someone to the faith after a long period of time, or even the return of someone to the state of grace after committing a grievous sin. If we feel relieved, imagine the joy our heavenly Father must experience.

God is literally seeking us out with every opportunity, trying to call us to repent, to turn back towards him. He is beckoning every time those pangs of conscience prick our souls- He is reminding us gently, and sometimes not so gently. St. Augustine wisely noted: "God wills that our desire should be exercised in prayer, that we may be able to receive what he is prepared to give."³

So, we must prepare ourselves to be found by God, to be pardoned, but also prepare to make changes to our behavior when it offends God's commandments. We just observed the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. Ask God to deepen your desire to embrace your daily Cross, if that is what is needed. Ask for an increased desire to turn away from vice, and to embrace that better path to holiness. But if we do so with a divided heart, then we will be at war with ourselves. Our anger towards God's seeming lack of response may in fact be a reflection of the divided quality of our request.

God is fully prepared to turn away his wrath, and Jesus will continue to seek the lost sheep in our midst. Let us pray for the grace to remain united together in prayer and intercession for one another, relying on the manifold graces of God to lead us home.

³ St. Augustine, *Epistle* 130, 8, 17