

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER, JULY 28 2019

Abraham's negotiation over the fate of Sodom is nothing short of remarkable. He is literally bargaining God down as to the number of innocents needed in order to stay the divine wrath. Apparently there were not at least ten righteous men when all was said and done, for as we know, the Lord ended up destroying the cities of the plain with fire. In Jesus' parable on prayer he too emphasizes persistence, even to the point of annoyance. But who is it who is bargained down to the point of a compliant irritation? God or man? Surely not the former, for God cannot change or be changed; hence it must be man who changes.

Given this, why is perseverance demanded of us, since it would seem that our prayers seek to change not God but ourselves? I would answer that persistence is required due to our own innate unwillingness to surrender our will to God's. This refusal prevents us from embracing that transformation which he would freely gift to us. Indeed perhaps the real answer to that which we seek is the very change we are reluctant to undergo. Please remember that the issue here is never God, for he always answers our prayers. The only real question is: Are we able to hear his response?

There are, of course, many types of prayer. The greatest of these is the Eucharist which by its nature provides the one answer for which we truly and deeply yearn. Yet beyond all liturgical prayer the Christian must be willing to enter into the realm of silence. This kind of praying is a type of contemplative docility which is nothing less than a state of complete receptivity to God where prayer

and answer are one. But for most of us, we need more obvious aid and so we have been presented with the great gift of the Lord's Prayer. This is the quintessential Christian prayer and each one of us should pray it daily. In tandem with this greatest of petitions, we have also received the opportunity to participate in the regular celebration of the Sacraments and of the great devotions themselves.

Yet here too our ability to hear and respond is dependent upon our proximate disposition and an efficacious reception. The Scripture we have all just heard, the homily preached, the Eucharist offered and the Lord's Prayer recited, all precede the reception of holy communion and are carefully crafted to maximize our receptivity to the given answer of God to our expressed and hidden needs. My prayer is that each of us is truly ready to deeply receive God's grace with true effect.