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“Have no anxiety at all, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is the shared idea of stage-performers and theater-goes that there is a fourth wall that separates the audience and actors. Technically, the actors relate to each other as though they are in an enclosed rectangular space: the four walls of a room. Meanwhile, practically, the fourth wall is removed for the cameras to roll and the audience to see. The actors, usually, stay behind the invisible fourth wall. In rare cases, a character turns to the audience and breaks the fourth wall. This is called a theatrical aside and – in effect – allows the actor to speak privately to the audience.

In Shakespeare, for example, Prince Hamlet gives an aside to complain about the king, Claudius, who is also his uncle. On NBC *The Office*, Michael Scott (Steve Carell), the branch manager, makes asides for only the camera and viewers to hear. Michael Scott will lament about a mythical adversary called “Corporate”.

In consideration of a sermon “Prayer” written by Father Ronald Knox, I would like to touch on the 3 aspects of prayer. The Wall of Prayer; The Words of Prayer; The Will of Prayer.

The Wall of Prayer. Father Knox compares our petitions and conversations with God to an aside, as though you and I are actors on a stage: “When into the darkness you speak your aside, you are for once speaking to real people. And that is what prayer is, it means using your powers of speech and thought and will to put yourself in communication with that real world which looks all dark to us, the supernatural world.” (*Ronald Knox, “Prayer”, Pastoral and Occasional Sermons, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002, p. 550*)

It was the first prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary that recognized, in darkness and invisibility, there was life. Mary said, when learning of God’s plan: “Let it be done to me according to thy word.” (Luke 1:38). This was an aside which no one around her could detect. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were breaking through – this is the Good News – the fourth wall of earthly human existence.

Jesus also teaches us that prayer is often a breakthrough from darkness to light. For example, the Gospel parables remind us of one who overcomes being marginalized or pushed aside by persistence of prayer, thus breaking through a wall. This is the message of *The Importunate Friend* (Luke 11:5-13), *The Importunate Widow* (Luke 18:1-8). And, in the parable of the *Pharisee and the Tax Collector*, we see the latter person – the tax collector, a shady character in his day – gave a sincere aside to God and begged for mercy. Meanwhile, the Pharisee played only to the other actors for effect. (Luke 18:9-14).

The Words of Prayer. Father Knox touches on why we use words in prayer, and restates the obvious objection – particularly of a non-believer or agnostic – that it is “an abuse of language to say that I am talking to God.” (R. Knox, p. 551) After all, God and I are not exchanging ideas and news or emailing

attached video clips as two people do. Nevertheless, some things need to be said. If, for example, you make a very generous gift you may know that the other person must be pleased. Nevertheless, it is conventional for us to express gratitude openly.

At the same time, the closer our intimacy with another person is, we may use fewer words. Two spouses – after years of marriage – may communicate an important idea with one word rather than a sentence or sometimes just by saying the other person's name.

It does require practice by all of us to develop a conversational routine with our Lord and Savior.

The Will of Prayer. We come to church and to prayer not only to say words but also to see and to be seen. St. John Vianney famously described his interactions with God as: "I look at Him and He looks at me." In this regard, in adoration and contemplation of our Lord, we also break through the fourth wall.

We come to church because we believe that God also wants to see us and love us, that our neighbors want to see us and love us. Your presence – our presence – matters.

We come before God to make petitions and make requests. Yet, by asking we are also professing our faith and trust in God's will and grace. Father Knox points out that it does not matter if children are expressing their need for skateboards or the parents that they wear their helmets, the petitions are signs. And, signs lead somewhere. They lead us to God's grace and strength.

Father Knox encourages us not to be caught up in the how of prayer but in the why and will:

"Ask, and you shall receive, [God] doesn't want us to puzzle our heads over the machinery of it all, he wants us to [arrive] like children, not ashamed to tell ... what we have set our hearts on. Only, at the back of it all, the object of prayer is not to make God want we want, it is to make us want what God wants – in his will lies our peace." (R. Knox, p. 553)

+ BLESSED CHRISTMAS + BLESSED NEW YEAR OF 2019 TO YOU AND YOURS.

Father Jim Ferry, Pastor

The Prayer of an Unknown Civil War Soldier

I asked for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy; I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for but everything that I had hoped for. Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered, I am, among all men, most richly blessed.



"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE." (JOHN 3:16)