

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Oct 9th 2014

The psalm for today is taken from the Gospel of Luke and is the Gospel canticle used for Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. It is a beautiful statement of why God deserves our praise. It is a litany of what God has done for his people. He has come to them, raised up a mighty savior, made promises, saved them, promised to show mercy, remembered his holy covenant that he made with them, swore an oath to their father Abraham, made it possible for us to be holy, and has freed us from our enemies, freed us to worship him without fear all the days of our life. He has come to us; we have not come to him. He is not a God that needs to be cajoled or berated to get his attention and aid.

With this in the background, the words of Jesus in the Gospel make perfect sense. If we know that this is the type of God we have, it will influence how we pray. The first thing he emphasizes is that we must be persistent in prayer. This is not because God does not care or needs to be awakened from his slumber or is not paying attention. The psalmist has already disabused us of that notion. No, persistence in prayer is for our good. We need to learn to never give up. We are humans and God's ways are not ours so sometimes we think that God is not listening or does not want to help us.

So Jesus sets out to show us that this is not the God we serve. First, God is our friend. Now, if I wake my friend up in the middle of the night to ask a favor, that will test our friendship. God, however, is not like this friend. Jesus uses the illustration to teach persistence but let us not think that we have to be persistent until God is bothered enough to help us. No, God is more than a friend; he is our Father in heaven. He wants to answer our prayers and give us what we need. He is even better than our human fathers who know how to give good gifts to their children. Let these words sink in: "how much more." How much more does God know how to give us good gifts. How much more is he willing to give those gifts. How much more does he want to give the Holy Spirit to us. He wants us to learn how to rely on him, to trust him, to ask him for what we need.

Imagine for a moment now how the apostle Paul must have felt when pagans who had come to believe in God through faith in Jesus were being bewitched by those who said that trusting in God was not good enough but that they also had to follow and perform the works of the Mosaic law. The Father gives the Spirit to those who ask him, those who trust him. So, Paul asks, did you receive the Spirit through faith or through works of the law? Is it possible to be spinning our wheels, vainly trying to work our way to heaven? Can a person get so confused that they become spiritually stupid? Paul seems to think so. These are hard words for the world in which we live but there is simply no substitute for trusting in a God who loves us, wants to give us everything, and demonstrated it by submitting to death on a cross.