

Gospel: LK 18: 1-8

I remember watching an episode of The Simpsons years ago. Bart was terrified that he would fail his tests and then be held back a year in school. He was not at all prepared for the tests. So he dropped to his knees and began to pray. Moments later his sister Lisa walked by Bart's room, saw Bart praying, and remarked, "Prayer, the last refuge of the scoundrel." In desperation Bart had turned to God as a last resort.

How many times have we found ourselves in trouble or afraid for either ourselves or someone else and as a last resort turned to God for help? I can think of several times in my own life when I did exactly that. Yes, I prayed when I went to Mass and said Grace before meals, but really, that was about the extent of my personal prayer life. Then one day a little over 30 years ago, the California Highway Patrol found me driving my car home with considerably more alcohol in my blood stream than I should have had. Another time Fran was in surgery and the outcome could have left her unable to have any children, or worse. Years later I was at my father's bedside as he lay dying. On each of these occasions, I turned to God, asking him for his help, sometime even "bargaining" with him. But once the situation had passed, my prayer life, if you could call it that, returned to what it had always been.

Turning to God should never be a last resort. We should have an ongoing relationship with him fed by frequent persistent daily prayer. Our prayer need not always be to ask God for something. In prayer, we should take the time to adore our God, to tell him how sorry we are for our sins, to thank him for his many gifts to us, and yes, to ask for his help. A-C-T-S, adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication, four distinct dimensions of prayer.

God knows everything about us, our joys and sorrows, our deepest desires and needs, our fears, everything. But he wants us to share these with him. He is our loving father. As parents we want our children to tell us what's going on in their lives, even those things we already know about. And in that regard our heavenly father is no different. He wants us to come to him with all the issues in our lives.

The Catechism tells us "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God" [CCC 2559]. Clearly, actively participating in (which means joining in the singing and praying and not merely being a spectator at) the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, where we draw into the present the greatest sign of God's love for us, the sacrifice of his only Son, is the highest prayer we can offer. We can pray the Divine Office, rosaries, the Chaplet of Mercy, and so many other prayers, as well. But prayer does not have to be formal, and we don't always have to do the talking. Reading Scripture, looking at the night sky in a place where there is no ambient light and pondering the greatness of our God who created it all out of nothing, or simply seeing God in a mountain vista, a sunrise, a little flower or any other aspect of the beauty of nature or even in each other can all be part of our prayer lives. When we perform some act of kindness or charity we can tell our

heavenly father “Lord, for all you’ve done for me, I’m doing this for you.” Or sometime, we can just sit there in sacred silence, resting in the loving presence of God.

We need to remember to occasionally shut up and listen to God’s voice responding to us. One evening during Eucharistic adoration, I was sitting quietly before the Blessed Sacrament when I was overcome with a sense of deep peace and calm, and realized without thinking the words that all God wants to do with me is love me. I can’t say how long that experience lasted, minutes, seconds, or even less. I’ve never had that feeling again even though I would so like to re-experience it, but the memory of it has stayed with me ever since. And that’s what God wants with all of us, just to love us, and for us to respond to that love in our actions toward one another – and in prayer.