

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C): God Makes All Things Beautiful In His Time

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138:1-2,2-3,6-7,7-8; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-13

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

God makes all things beautiful in his time. This is one of the beautiful affirmations of our faith. Let us always keep this in our hearts, and allow me to share a story as we further reflect on this affirmation of faith.

One day a man came to the rectory knocking at the door very hard, almost breaking the door. He was one of the parishioners of one of the parishes I served on Big Island. He was so upset with God, so disappointed that God did not answer his prayer. He said, "Father, I've lost much money in Las Vegas for many years. Because of that, I am broke! I don't like what I am now. I kept coming back to Las Vegas to get back some of my money, and I asked God that I may win just once, but I did not have that luck. I am losing my faith in God." I want to take his side, at least for a while. I told him there are moments when God is silent to our request, the reason we'll learn later. I told him I would pray for him.

Jesus never tired of repeating that God answers our prayers. In the Gospel reading, we heard him say, "And I tell you, ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and the one who knocks, the door will be opened." These words of Jesus and all his other similar declarations are quite sweeping: "ask and you shall receive" (Jn 16,24; Mt 7,7); "the Father will give you anything you ask of him in my name" (Jn 16,23); "whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Mk 11,24; Mt 21,22); "if two of you agree on earth anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Mt 18,19). They all tell us with certainty that the father in heaven hears and answers our prayers. We glimpse this truth through God's response to Abraham's petition to spare the people from punishment for the sake of a few innocent people. God listened to the persistence of Abraham. And this certainty is proclaimed in the responsorial psalm very well, "Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me" (Ps 138:3).

However, it may seem contradictory to the experience of the person I mentioned earlier and maybe with some people. After all, how many times have we asked for something in prayer without obtaining it? Sometimes the things asked for were quite ordinary and, in our view, very necessary; yet, we have not received what we asked for. How then are we to understand these words of Jesus? The difficulty is real, but something is exciting to notice in all the statements of Jesus in the Gospels concerning the efficacy of prayer. If Jesus is emphatic about the sure results of prayer, he is, on the other hand, silent on one point: that of time. He never says that we shall obtain whatever we ask for at once, and time is exceptionally significant.

The song "In His Time" beautifully stresses this element: God makes all things beautiful in his time. Those with a long habit of prayer can testify to a fact drawn from experience that prayer of petition tends to change content over time. Undoubtedly, because "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8,26), we ask for many things that would not be suitable to us at the beginning of our dialogue with God.

Our Lord Jesus says, "As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Mt.7,11). Meaning God knows what's best for us! God will always do whatever is in our best interest. His silence doesn't mean he is not hearing us or doing anything. He allows a lapse of time to let our hearts desire what he wants for us, to let our hearts long only for the Highest Good. Why settle for less? Remember the words of Jesus, "Seek ye first the Kingdom, and everything will follow."

It becomes, therefore, significant that a certain lapse of time is necessary. The time it takes for our heart, under the gentle motion of the Holy Spirit, to gradually come around to desire or long only for what God wants to give us. It is a time when our heart may finally learn: "Lord, whatever is best for my soul, your will be done, or let your Holy Will be the desire of my heart."

When my father was diagnosed with heart and liver complications, we were terrified to know he was dying. We were all praying to God, storming the heavens with petitions for healing, and granting more years to witness me walk on stage for my graduation from college seminary and my ordination to the priesthood. Unfortunately, our father died even earlier than predicted years. He died at 61 years old. It was a big letdown for us, who were so desperate but hopeful for his

healing. My initial reaction was that God didn't listen and answer our prayers. However, my mother, who was in pain of losing a beloved husband, told us: "God did answer our prayer but differently. God didn't want him to prolong his suffering anymore, so God took him away from sickness." At first, I thought it was a naïve understanding, but she was right; however, it took me a while to realize and accept.

God answered our prayers according to his design. He did not only answer our prayers but transformed our hearts. He allows us to be broken, at least for a moment, like a mirror shattered when broken, but the broken pieces reflect multiple lights. Often, anyone who bounced back from being broken sees life differently.

God answers our prayer! Our Lord Jesus reminds us that God is our father; he knows best. Therefore, we come to him in prayer as children. We go to Him with a spirit of trust and an expectant heart. We become better "children of prayer" when we learn what it means to be a little child resting in the hands of God the Father. Like children, who marvel even at small things because of their innocent curiosity, let us allow God to surprise us with what he wills to give to us. And if you think that your prayer seems not granted as you wish, believe that something better is coming up for you! God, our Father in Heaven, makes all things beautiful in his time! But we are to wait patiently and persevere!

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor