

Ask and it will be given to you

Reading: Matthew 7 verses 7-12

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew speaks to us about God's promise to answer our prayers and says that our searching will be successful. He has promised.

We call this an act of faith. We can neither prove it nor disprove it. It is one of God's promises. But we know very well that our desires are not always satisfied. How can we talk of promise or of covenant?

I would like to think about how God answers our prayers in relation to a subject which concerns us all: global warming and everything resulting from that.

And I want to reflect on this in the light of the papal encyclical 'Laudato si' or 'Praise be to you' on care for our common home'.

Edited in 2015 by Pope Francis and written eight years ago, the predictions have often already been overtaken by reality, but here we are interested only in its theology.

The encyclical states that climate change particularly afflicts those with the least resources. Because of this, all plans to reduce our carbon footprint need to consider the impact of those plans on the living conditions of the poor.

For the pope, that approach is fundamental.

Secondly, he shares with us his conviction that there is no system which cancels out completely our openness to good, to truth and to beauty, nor the capacity which God

continues to nurture in the depth of the hearts of all mankind. And he asks each person in the world not to forget their dignity, which no-one has the right to take away from them.

Paragraph 205 of the encyclical states:

'Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.'

Here again a witness to faith! So, always and everywhere on Earth, the freedom to act according to the Will of God remains. Here, the pope offers us a glimpse into his intimate thoughts. We can share in his faith or reject it, but we cannot refute it. Faith does not come to us via our brains but via our heart; it thus becomes part of our identity.

And then, the third recommendation: stay cheerful!

Being in a good mood is thus one of the fruits of faith. We are instructed to be cheerful. For me, there is a certain humour in wanting to command us to be cheerful; how can one impose cheerfulness? The answer is: by taking care!

This is explained in paragraphs 222-223 in the encyclical:

'Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that "less is more". A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures.... In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So, they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer.'

The Christian faith attracts criticism because it is viewed as being anti-nature. In fact, in the bible, there is no conflict between nature and mankind. Numerous passages exhort us to have consideration for the trees and the animals.

For example, it is forbidden to cut the trees which surround a besieged city because you are not at war with the trees. And the same for the animals.

God did not create Leviathan (a sea monster, identified in different passages with the whale and the crocodile e.g. Job 41, Ps. 74:14, and with the Devil e.g. Isa. 27:1) just as a play-thing. The ox must not be muzzled during the threshing of the wheat, etc.

Now, I come back to the initial question: how does God fulfill our prayers? Search and you will find! We also find in the promises of the book of Matthew a role for mankind.

We must align our prayers and our needs to God's promises. The covenant with God makes us the building blocks to build his Kingdom. Our fight for a habitable world is inscribed in this vision of the bible. I speak of seeing the elderly who watch children playing in the road or of seeing people who are sitting under their fig tree meditating.

Our efforts to fight climate change will not be in vain, because God's promise to us is sufficient. God helps those who help themselves!

I conclude with the 'Prayer for our earth' at the end of Pope Francis' encyclical :

'All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.'

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