

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
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The Prayer of Persistence

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

*"You who call on the Lord,
give yourself no rest, and give Him no rest
till He establishes Jerusalem
and makes her the praise of the earth."
Isaiah 62:6-7*

One of the most critical differences between God and man is the matter of necessity – who needs who? Theologians tell us that God is a 'necessary' being. Necessary in this case means that He is self-sufficient. He needs nothing outside of Himself. Necessary in this case also means that He is essential for the existence of everything else; without Him nothing else would exist.

Man on the other hand is a 'contingent' being. Man's existence is contingent on the existence of God. Man needs God. There is no such thing as man without God. For while God doesn't need man to exist, man needs – in fact, is absolutely dependent on – God (cf. Job 34:14-15).

While this kind of theology rubs against our human pride and ego, in our heart of hearts we understand it to be true. And it's this understanding of the basic difference between the Creator and the created that lays the framework for Christian discipleship, humility, and surrender. Only in

blind arrogance and hubris would we ever find ourselves speaking to God like the clay which speaks against the Potter in Isaiah 45:9.

And yet God's love for us is such that, while He can exist without us, He willingly opens His heart to be affected and impacted by us, especially through our prayers. God opens Himself to exercise a willing vulnerability on His part, to be touched and stirred by His children even to the changing of His mind. We can stir God to change His mind? How can that be?

We're all taught that a part of God's nature is His omniscience, and a part of being omniscient (or all-knowing) is foreknowledge. That means He already knows the outcome of every situation. But if He knows what will happen, how is it that He can

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turn back from a decision He has made based on the earnest intercessions of His children? Somehow He knows the future with perfect detail and somehow He can change His mind. And somehow these two things are true at the same time...and we're a part of it. I'm not quite sure how it works, but what it means is that our faith is not a fatalistic one; God permits us in a profound way to influence the economy of heaven and its expression here on earth.

This is what happened in the life of Moses. At least twice Moses had a direct impact in averting God's

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intentions to wipe out stubborn Israel in the wilderness and start over again with a more obedient people (Exodus 32:9-14; Numbers 14:11-21; cf., Psalm 106:23). We see the same thing happening as Abraham negotiated for the sparing of Sodom if even a handful of righteous people could be found inside the city (Genesis 18:20-33). And we see the same thing happening again in the parables of Jesus as He describes the critical value of persistent prayer even when the door seems to be shut or when the objective seems to be out of reach (Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8).

Perhaps one of the most poignant admonitions we have in this regard is a rather obscure verse found in Isaiah 62:6-7. While chapter 62 is a triumphal passage about the glorious restoration of Zion, tucked right in the middle of it is an often overlooked call for the watchmen to keep the pressure on God until He fulfills what He has promised to do. The watchmen are never to be silent, day or night: **“You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest.”**

Those called upon to keep watchful vigil are admonished to be relentless in their chorus of prayer. ‘Watch and pray’ is a regular theme of Jesus (cf., Matthew 26:41; Mark 13:33, 14:38; Luke 21:36) as well as Paul (I Thessalonians 5:17). The result of this earnestness in prayer is the affect that it has on God: **“...and give Him no rest till He establishes Jerusalem....”** The Hebrew here means that we are instrumental in keeping God from terminating, concluding, shutting down, or drawing a matter to a close until the eternal counsels of heaven are brought to perfect completion on earth. How often do we look at something difficult and say, “I can’t do that,” or “I’m too tired to go another step?” Not with God. We participate as His cheering squad, calling Him to produce in reality what He has purposed in His heart.

It’s like the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 who pressed and pressed Jesus until He healed her demon-possessed daughter. We are the watchmen of our parishes and communities, and we have the task of supplicating God until we see His hand move; lifting up the cry, **“thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Nothing can be more vital and humbling than the task of prayer in the corporate life of a church!

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This all came home a few weeks ago while talking to a member of our fellowship about something that required an action on my part. I ended the phone call by saying, “Keep the pressure on me; don’t give me any slack until I get it done.” I think that’s a good way of looking at prayer. God has so established the parameters of His economy that He delights in our participation, especially through our persistence. You can almost hear God say, “Keep at it. Give me no rest. Let me know how important this is to you, and then you’ll see how important it is to me, too.”

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan Andraeas

Ancient Quote of the Month...

In every newsletter I would like to add a quote from one of the ancient prayers or writings of our Church. With Easter right upon us, let me introduce you to a portion of an Easter Sermon from St. John Chrysostom (347-407), Bishop of Constantinople, Doctor of the Church, and a ‘domestic monastic’ (John had aspirations of being a monk, but due to the poor health of his mother he stayed home as her care giver while fulfilling his strong ascetic desire by living under a monastic rule).

Everyone who is devout and a lover of God, let them enjoy this beautiful and radiant Feast of Feasts! Let all partake of the Feast of Faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness.

Let none lament their poverty, for the Universal Kingdom has been revealed.

Let none mourn their transgressions, for Pardon has dawned from the Tomb!

Let no one fear Death, for the Savior’s death has set us free!

He that was taken by Death has annihilated it! He descended into Hell, and took Hell captive! He embittered it when it tasted His Flesh! It was embittered, for through Him it was abolished! It was embittered, for through Him it was mocked! It was embittered, for through Him it was taken in chains! It took what it thought was a mortal body, and it came face to face with God! It took earth, and encountered Heaven! “Oh Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?”

*Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!
Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!
Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!
Christ is risen, and Life reigns!*

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the tombs!

For Christ being raised from the dead has become the first-fruits of them that slept. To Him be glory and dominion through all the ages of ages!

Does God Need Our Help?

Mother Sue Andraeas, Prioress

It happened again. I began to tell Fr. Alan the direction my newsletter article seemed to be taking, and he got that strange look in his eye; the one that means the Lord was leading us to write about the same topic again. When I was done with my verbal outline, though, he said, "Well, this time we totally contradict each other but it will still work, I think."

How can the Lord contradict Himself? Well, He can't. Still, the paradoxes of faith sometimes make it appear as though He does. I've come to realize through the years that it is only our limited understanding that creates theological contradictions, and not the Lord Himself. How does intercession *work*? Do we influence God's decisions? Are we co-laborers with Him? Can God change His mind? And if so, how much control will He allow us to have?

The best way for me to ponder our relationship with God is to think of children and a loving parent. I began to think of 'intercession' on that level. Mom asks her toddler son what he wants to do today. He wants to paint. He wants to go to the park and feed the geese. He wants to eat a blue Popsicle. Mom suggests they go to the playground instead of the park. (It's closer to the errands she needs to run. Besides, she just washed the floors, geese are dirty birds, and little sneakers tend to carry the dirt back home.) Nope – he wants to feed geese, not swing on swings. What does the mom do? She gives in, this time. She gets the paints out for him to do while she finishes up some 'big people things.' She takes him to the park, along with a bag of



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cracked corn for the geese. She stops for popsicles on the way home; a box with blue ones. Why? Is she trying to spoil her son? Of course not! But she is letting him voice an opinion about how their day should unfold. He learns to make good decisions that way, learns relationship, how to voice his opinions and desires, and gives him a sense of control over his life. SHE still dictates the 'important' parts of his day. She still insists on veggies and milk (not soda) at dinner time. She holds fast to the nap rule in the afternoon. And

while she may let him choose his own outfit that doesn't really match, she still insists on a shirt and pants, 2 socks and sneakers – and a jacket with a hood. But her son, seeing all his requests met, knows he has contributed to the daily schedule – to history as he knows it. He perceives this as Mom's love for him (probably on an unconscious level) and knows life is good.

What if our little toddler had requested a trip to the toy store to buy one of everything on the shelves? What if he had asked to eat only cookies for dinner? What if he had asked to do something dangerous, not knowing it was dangerous? Would Mom comply for the sake of his happiness? Of course not! Would he understand? Probably not. He would probably decide Mom was a big meanie and nobody understands him. (Can you see yourself when God refuses to grant you the desires of your temper tantrums? I can.) Toddlers can be rather shortsighted and more interested in the pleasure of the moment than the wellbeing of eternity. (We are still toddlers in the Heavenly Kingdom; we only know toddler-level events, even though we get glimpses of the bigger picture.) The other thing to consider is why the toddler did not ask for cookies for lunch. (He only asked for a popsicle.) What kept him from

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demanding more? My guess is that it was his relationship to his mother, his knowing her ‘meal rules,’ or maybe it was because he’s been refused cookie lunches for the past several days and he’s now gotten wiser. Our relationship with God, our spending time with Him, learning His ‘rules,’ His authority, and most of all, His love for us, will help us know what we can intercede for and what we cannot. (Is it possible that God, like the Mom, just might let us have cookies for lunch one day – just to show us what will happen? It’s risky business asking for things that go against the rules of a parent – or a Parent!)

Our little toddler friend also refrained from another kind of request. He did not ask that his Mom go throw sand in the face of the girl next door, who became enemy #1 yesterday by breaking his favorite toy truck – on purpose. I was reminded of this kind of ‘intercession’ this morning as I read Joshua 5:13-18. Joshua is within sight of Jericho when, in front of him, appears a man with a drawn sword. “Are you for us or against us?” he asks. The reply? “Neither.” This *man* was the commander of the Lord’s army! The citizens of Jericho were about to get their city destroyed! Wouldn’t you come to the conclusion that God’s army commander would be on Joshua’s side? But he wasn’t. God was not on the *side* of either group of people, even though He would bring judgment upon Jericho by using the Israelites to bring down its walls. (Peter learned this truth centuries later, and reminds us that “God does not show favoritism” Acts 10:34.) God is not on *our* side; we choose to be in *His* side, or on the side that opposes Him. Often-times, our intercessions reveal more of our spiritual immaturity than we are willing to see. Do we forgive our ‘toy-breakers’ or do we ask God to fling sand in their faces? But aren’t we glad that God does not move at the hand of those who ask Him to fling sand at us when we are the ‘toy-breakers?’

I’ve heard the phrase, “Prayer does not change God, prayer changes us,” and there is some truth to it. We can learn, and be purified, by a disciplined life of prayer and intercession. God has a plan for history that cannot be changed. We tend to forget, though, that His concept of history is as different from man’s as our toddler’s concept of a daily schedule differed from his Mom’s. He had no concept of the ‘big people’ events and activities that

had to take place. Likewise, we do not know all that God knows about our daily events and activities. His ways are quite above our ability to comprehend (Is. 55:9). The Mom did not neglect paying the mortgage and buying the groceries for the sake of a day at the park with the geese. Neither will God neglect the events of His schedule for the sake of

“Our role, as intercessors, is to respect His position as Father.”

our desires. Fr. Alan says we can change God’s mind – and we can. But we cannot change His unfolding of history. Our role, as intercessors, is to respect His position as Father. Share with Him the desires of your heart. Share with Him your pain over a broken ‘toy’ – or a broken heart – when a friend betrays you. Let Him know that you would still rather have life’s ‘cookies’ than life’s ‘veggies,’ and gradually accept His wise limitations as healthy for you. There is a peace that comes with a life of intercession, knowing that God is listening AND that He has your best interest in mind. It makes life’s veggies more delicious – and life’s cookies more rewarding.

Rejoice!

P.S. This week, our son Zac — the best cookie-eating, goose-feeding toddler this Mom has ever seen — turns 20. Happy Birthday, Zac. Eat your veggies. ☺

Thanks to everyone who has provided us with input on the draft Breviary. Your responses have been invaluable as we make these important changes. Please pray for the copyright process!

“Your mother,...your son!”

Holy Week Reflection

For a lot of churches that don't observe the Stations of the Cross during Lent, the “Seven Last Sayings of Christ from the Cross” serve as a wonderful alternative. These words of Christ, spoken in the throes of His crucifixion, literally contain the proclamation and fulfillment of God's salvation history.

While most of these utterances are drawn from Messianic prophecy or crystallize the tremendous doctrines of salvation into just a couple of words, one stands as an enigmatic mystery (and the pastor who's assigned that text for an ecumenical Lenten gathering often feels the pressure of “getting the one that no one else wants”), **“Woman, behold your son!...Behold your mother!”** (John 19:26-27).

What a tender display of Christ's love as He sees to the ongoing care of His mother in the face of His crucifixion. But is there more to these words than a son making provision the wellbeing of a parent? Perhaps.

As I prayed over the meaning of these words, a picture took shape in my heart; a picture of kinship. Jesus made it clear throughout His ministry that since the kingdom of heaven was now present among those who followed Him, new relationships were being knit that weren't present before.

Most notable is when He answered the call of those who said that His mother and brothers were asking for Him. Jesus' response was that His brother, sister, and mother were now those who did God's will (Matthew 12:50; Mark 3:35). A similar declaration was at the tomb when He told Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to go back to Jerusalem and tell His ‘brothers’ (the new, post-resurrection term for His disciples) that He would see them in Galilee (Matthew 28:10). In these kinds of instances Jesus

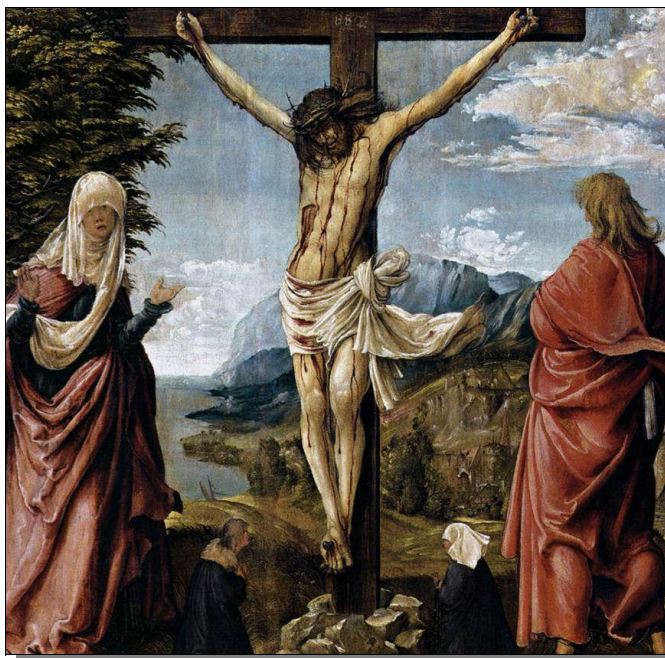
“We can have a relationship with Christ without necessarily having a relationship with each other, but that's not the way it should be.”

is speaking about the relationship He has with those who follow Him; about how He is connected to them. He's not so much describing their connection to each other but to Himself as He declares His kinship with them: **“MY brother, MY sister, MY mother.”**

But this all changes at the cross. Something very different is taking place here as He looks at Mary and John. Something very significant is unfolding here as they stand there sharing in the sacrifice of His suffering. Their proximity to the cross not only draws them closer to Him, but to one another – and a new kind of kinship is established. Their connection to Jesus now connects them to each other and makes them mother and son to one another: **“Behold YOUR son!...Behold YOUR mother!”**

As I prayed and meditated on this it just seemed to be so very clear: we can have a relationship with Christ without necessarily having a relationship with each other, but that's not the way it should be. Our

relationship with Christ – especially as we draw closer and closer to the cross – should also draw us together as members of one family. In other words, as we press closer into the cross we're also pressing closer into each other until Jesus declares us to be in a new relationship that even surpasses our own birth families. What a wonderful thought for us to carry into Holy Week and Good Friday.



The cross of Christ, His suffering and His agony, makes us not only citizens of heaven but family on earth. The closer our parishes can draw themselves to the foot of the cross the more Jesus can work us the miracle of kinship, in this world and in the next. ✕

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