

Twenty-Seventh Week of Ordinary Time
October 6, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #41

“Does God hear the prayers of sinners?” My best possible answer: “Yes and No.”

As we have spent this year reflecting upon the Eucharist, the reality of it being the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and the importance of receiving it in a worthy manner (again, free from sin), I found the answer to this question important enough to address as the subject of our time today. In a recent article I submitted to the religious section of *The Call News*, I readily admitted the question initially confused me when it was asked. I had been taught, for as long as I could remember, to believe that God, in His mercy, hears and answers every prayer. It had been explained, concerning certain very difficult situations, that there were times when His answer was “No,” but He does answer every prayer. I have always thought this explanation to be lacking something. What the “something” was, I had never found the words or the answer. The answer I was presented of “Yes and No” may not appear to be the most acceptable answer. Nevertheless, I will try, to the best of my ability, to explain this answer and why this answer is pertinent to our discussion of the Sacraments of Reconciliation/Confession and the Eucharist.

If we are to attempt to understand this very difficult answer, we must examine Saint Thomas Aquinas and his teaching concerning “Merit.” We begin by asking the question: What is Merit? For many, the word “Merit” coincides with the word “Justice.” As children, we were taught it is good, just and fair to offer a person compensation for the rightful debt owed them or, put another way, to give them what they have merited. We extol and immortalize individuals who, through personal sacrifice, have merited a particular honor. We name streets, recite their most famous sayings, read about their lives and place statues and/or paintings in valued places to remember them. It is because they endured what they did, we offer them this privileged place. Ask yourself, IF someone you love and admire had personally suffered and sacrificed to achieve a special thing and another, who had not endured the same, were presented before you claiming they deserved the same honor as the one you loved, THEN, how would you offer them equal admiration? Now, apply this same question/situation to God. Would you expect His answer to be the same as your own?

Before one can choose to either accept or reject the answer of “Yes and No,” we must state what we believe and profess concerning God and prayer. We believe God does answer prayer and this is the “Yes” aspect of the answer. We also believe that God, because He is God, has a right to our best and most honest effort as His child. He expects each of us to genuinely strive to enter through the narrow gate. Furthermore, Jesus tells us to be “perfect as His Heavenly Father is perfect.” We rightly acknowledge our weaknesses as a result of sin. Despite the mistakes and failures we have all endured, IF we are sincerely trying to live the Christian life His Love demands and requires, THEN we are assured of His hearing our prayers. My family, God hears humble prayer. A humble prayer is one offered by the person who voluntarily, not out of force or fear, chooses to acknowledge and confess their sins, seek to amend their lives and follow where He leads not counting the costs. However, God does not only hear the prayers of

those who are trying to live a Christian life each day. His just mercy demands He even hears the prayer of one of His children who has wandered far away from Him and now is seeking to return. We would do well to remind ourselves of the story of the Prodigal Son whose father embraced him upon his return. However scripted his apology, the Prodigal did exercise a modicum of humility and contrition toward his father upon his return. And, his father, chose to forgive him; not counting the enormous insult and pain inflicted against his wayward son. God WILL HEAR these prayers as well.

Should we expect God to do the same for those who are persistent, I use this word purposefully, in their sins? It is at this point that I found myself having to reconsider so much of what I had previously believed concerning God and the sinner. If a person, of their own free will, chooses to stubbornly remain in their sins, should that person expect to be treated in the same fashion as another who freely does what God asks? Let me rephrase this question. Does anyone living today have the right to demand God to listen to them? If the Pope came to the United States, could any person present arrive at the hosting venue and expect a private audience with him? We would probably not anticipate a private meeting for ourselves, but maybe a priest, a bishop or a religious brother or sister. Could they just show up and present themselves or their concerns, even if their concern is noble and praise-worthy, and be received? I believe we all know the answers. I also believe we tell ourselves God is better than us and therefore He will do what we ourselves will either not do nor expect to be done. I cannot, nor should not, expect to merit His listening to my petition when I close my ears to His commands, His Love, which have been freely offered. We must choose to freely accept and live by these. I leave you with one point to think about that I, myself, am struggling with. What is the more comforting thing to accept: (1) God heard your prayer and He said No or (2) God did not hear you because you have freely chosen to separate yourself from Him? Return to Him and be reconciled. Then, He will hear you.