

## **July 24, 2016 The Parable of the Importunate Neighbor:**

Brothers and sisters, in Australia's national art gallery one can see a remarkable oil painting by the renowned English painter, William Holman Hunt, a devout Evangelical Christian. The work is clearly inspired by the parable told by Christ in today's gospel, "The Parable of the Importunate Friend." (Lk.11:5-8) The painting depicts a lovely starlit evening. An anxious man stands at the door of his neighbor's home. The door is bolted... a sure sign that the head of the household does not wish to be disturbed. Off to one side of the painting are two dogs that freely drink from their master's water bowl. According to one critic's interpretation of Hunt's painting, "Even the dogs who drank from a water bowl in the starlit courtyard are shown more hospitality than the man who tries to borrow more bread from his neighbor".

In the culture of Our Lord's day, hospitality was a sacred duty. Failing to show a neighbor hospitality was considered bad manners and deeply offensive. Recall that the man whose sleep was likely interrupted begrudgingly gets up and provides his neighbor with what he so desperately needs. He was no cheerful giver!

The lesson of the parable is that God's way of giving exceeds that between friends and neighbors. Although friends sometime disappoint us and occasionally fail us, the same can not be said of Our Heavenly Father. God is willing to grant us an abundance of gifts when we pray with faith. Who can possibly forget the stunning words of our master, "Ask and it shall be given you. Knock and it shall be opened for you." (Lk.11:10) Scholars remind us that Luke is the Evangelist of prayer. He underscores our dependence on God, the importance of persisting in prayer, and not giving in to discouragement.

For us Christians the parable only makes sense if we identify with the anxious neighbor knocking on the door of heaven. In truth, we are all beggars! "Give us this day our daily prayer" (Lk.11:3) should be a daily prayer of the faithful Christian. We must never take any of Our Lord's many gifts for granted! In addition, the request the pleading neighbor made was actually on behalf of another person, a friend in need. Recall the words of the parable: "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him." (Lk.11:6)

A story... Once, Mother Teresa of Calcutta approached a wealthy Hindu man to ask him for a donation. At the time, she was acting on behalf of the poor and dying in her care. The man reacted angrily to her humble request, and in spite, spit on her. Mother remained calm. "That was your gift to me", she said, "Now what about the indigent people for whom I care."

How often do we hear the heartfelt request, "Pray for me". Do we honor his or her request? Are we indifferent? Do our prayers for others end after a few words of pleading?

Lord, teach us how to pray!