

Views from the Pews - On asking

Jesus said to his disciples, “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him”. (Matt 6:7-8)

One might wonder, if God knows what we need, and is the generous and loving Father that Jesus described as capable of removing our worry about not having enough to live on, why is there still so much poverty in the world? Especially as Jesus immediately went on to teach them the Lord’s Prayer, which commands us to ask: “Give us this day our daily bread”. Luke 11:9-10 adds an even more astonishing promise, that God has more than enough resources to meet everyone’s needs:

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Most of us are familiar with the system by which community or research funding is distributed through some sort of specialist committee. The committee is made up of people familiar with the problems in hand, and about what needs to be done or discovered to make progress. They have money to disburse and a fair idea of what difference it could make if distributed judiciously. They also know most of the people qualified to address the problems that need solving, and they are usually keen to make sure those people are supported. But they don’t offer the funds unasked. They simply wait until they receive a formal application. Then they give money to those proposed projects that could potentially do most good.

Could it be that God is a little bit like that? Jesus assured us that God knows what we need, and will supply it when we ask in faith, recognising our total dependence on God as creatures of grace. Of course there are some who ask in faith and are refused, especially if they ask for what God sees will not do us or the kingdom good, but the saints insist that God is then likely to give them something else instead. Perhaps the ones who miss out are simply the ones who do not ask.

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