

Reflection - Prayer Filipino style

I have already reflected on the great faith and courage of the Filipino people and now I am happy to admit they are good at praying too. As well as praying they have prayers said and the custom here is to place the petition in an envelope with money of course and hand it up at the offertory procession. Every mass has one and along with the envelopes come fruit and vegetables wrapped in gift paper. The envelopes go to the Priests and the food is for the poor. The offertory procession can be quite an event and probably this custom came through from Spanish times. The two usual collections are not affected by this custom of course. Each mass has its sponsors and they are read out at the beginning of mass and this can take as much as 15 minutes. A bit like our mass stipends I guess but these people are recognised by the MC. Seven Sunday masses each weekend are well attended I can assure you. Churches here are full of statues of different Santo Niños; different Madonnas not to mention the many saints that are venerated. Here in Hilongos a whole area of the church grounds, in what was the old church, is set aside for different statues some belonging to well to do families and others belonging to individual Barangays. Private family groups assemble to pray the rosary at any time of day or night or just sit and stay a while at these little grottos.

The old forms of devotions are very popular and are openly prayed in choir usually run by women. These can start with benediction then an office of the day then recitation of well known prayers and of course the rosary which is one of their favoured forms of prayer. Novenas are common occurrences and can happen any time of the year and usually before special events. Also in a part of the old church is the beautiful Blessed Sacrament chapel and it is open all day every day. People enter bare footed to adore the true presence in total silence. The faith is openly displayed; example of this being the people making the sign of the cross as they pass a church. Of course Mary plays a huge part in their lives and I feel she protects these people in a very special way.

The “Amahan Namo”, the Our Father, is another of their favourite prayers. It is more often than not sung in Cebuano and I have just about memorised it now as we say it in Cebuano each night here at our community prayer. Singing is something I really enjoy doing with the people. This prayer actually explains better than any thing the way people here pray. What do I mean? Well!

The Our Father is really an eight point lesson on prayer rather than a prayer itself, though it's that too.

Jesus said:

1. Address yourself to the **Father** when you pray.
2. Give due **respect and praise** to Him when you pray.
3. Have the attitude that **Gods Kingdom** is here among you while you are praying.
4. That the **Fathers Will** must be paramount at all times when you pray
5. Don't be afraid to **Ask** for what you need when you pray.
6. And remember you must **forgive 7 times 70 times** if your praying is going to be meaningful.
7. This will put you in a good frame of mind to **ask forgiveness** for your own failures when you pray

And finally remembering what Jesus said to Paul **“My grace is enough for you”**

8. Always ask that you not be **tested** beyond your capabilities when you pray

Not a bad lesson on prayer I would have thought and we get this free lesson every time we say the OUR FATHER so may be this is why these people here are so good at it. Lesson five above talks of petitioning prayer; it is probably good to have an open mind or what I would call a positive attitude to the way you perceive the prayer might be

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answered. Have you seen this piece of writing? I just think it's great and the Filipinos claim it for themselves. I don't know its source.

I asked God today:

- for strength that I might achieve, I was made weak to humbly obey.
- for health that I might do great things, I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
- for riches that I might be happy, I was given poverty that I might be wise.
- for power that I might hear the praises of men, I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
- for all things that I might enjoy all things, I got nothing that I asked for but every thing I had hoped for, almost despite myself.

My unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all people most richly blessed.

This is where the confidence the Filipinos have in approaching God in prayer comes from I suspect.

***"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* 1 John 5:14**

This is the secret to all prayer after all. God knows what we want before we utter a single word so we enter prayer in faith knowing that our prayers are already answered. That beautiful moment when Jesus with tears in his eyes was about to work the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead brings up this very point. He prayed:

***"Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I know indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me."* John 11:42**

The effectiveness of prayer is always a topic of discussion among theologians. How do we know if our prayer is answered? People pray for cures a lot and seem seldom to be answered. This very dilemma was thrown up at Jesus and His reply was to tell the story of the late visitor to a family's house looking for food. We know the head of the household did get up and satisfy the friend at the door despite his reluctance to do so. The words of Jesus that followed were if you like the punch line. "So I say to you: ask, and it will be given to you; search and you will find; for the one who asks always receives....." He even emphasises the point more forcefully by helping you recall how solicitous for your own children you are and it is as nothing compared to: "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:9-13

Then we have to conclude that all prayers said with faith are answered, it's just that we really can't guess how they will be answered or in what form that answer might take. I would go one step further and say you need the sort of faith that moves mountains sometimes to believe that indeed your pray was answered. Cancer is here in the Philippines like everywhere else and it takes 1000s of lives a year. It took our dear friend Caesar just a couple of months ago who taught us Cebuano at MILC. We prayed like Turks for his return to good health but somehow the Father had other plans which did not include Caesar being cured. They will be done in all things. A lady in Cork City, Ireland was cured of what seemed an incurable cancer after praying to Blessed Edmund Rice to intercede to God on her behalf. Some are cured, some are not, but despite this God the Father hears all our prayers and has promised He will answer each and every person who asks in Jesus name. The faith filled words of a Parent to our friend and benefactor, who is a Doctor here in Hilongos, after an unsuccessful operation "You tried your best Doctor, it was Gods will" is still ringing in my ears. It sounds a bit like the faith of Job is needed some times. I was introduced anew to contemplative prayer while doing the "God in the now" retreat in Perth. I have seen this form of prayer here in Hilongos but maybe one day it will take an even bigger hold among the people. I would like to finish this reflection with my heart prayer "Lord; help me to pray knowing you are indeed listening and that no matter how unworthy I am; you will answer me and that You're Will, will always prevail."