

Have you ever wondered what God does on a Sunday afternoon, you know after being in church all morning. I have it on good authority that not being much of a sports fan – cause he already know the winner, he puts up his feet, has a nice cup of herbal tea and fingers through some old albums. These are not old Beatles record albums but scrapbooks of prayers that he has received over the past several thousand years. You can imagine what a collection that must be. Well, being very organized, God has had all of these prayers categorized and sorted: in the **FIRST ALBUM** there are prayer of praise: the appreciation of countless millions of folk as they beheld glorious mountains, beautiful sunsets, the miracle of birth, the uniqueness of each person.

SECOND there are prayers of thanksgiving: words of gratitude for sunshine on parades and gentle rain on crops, for good health and acts of kindness.

THIRD there are the prayers of adoration: All those multitudes who have bowed their heads and bent their knees in recognition of God's goodness; such attention lavished on him makes God's eyes fill with tears --just like all that incense.

FOURTH there are prayers of petition. This is the largest album. Since creation of the human race, people have begged incessantly for favor -- everything from winning at las Vegas to passing a test. Some a rather humorous, but all a very human.

FIFTH there are the prayers of repentance: these pages are always damp with the tears of that often accompany these prayers, prayers that demonstrate the sorrow that resulted from failure, from lost opportunity. Even God sheds a tear or two over these pages as he witnesses the heroic efforts of people struggling to cope with their weakness.

FINALLY there is a category that is entitled, "uncertain." This section contains prayers that God doesn't know what to do with. For example, what do you do with someone who was thankful that he or she was not like the rest of the human race? Those people are always so boring and uninteresting. It never fails that when God comes to this section, he starts nodding and quickly falls into a peaceful slumber.

I hope our gathering here today is not just something to put God to sleep. But if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that far too often we have hearts and minds that are tuned in to nothing but the blunders, problems, crimes and sins of others:

- Well, at least I'm more successful than HE is
- Well, anyway, my grades are higher than hers
- Thank God my marriage is in better shape than theirs.

We seem to think that if we can spot another's weakness, we are then strong; because we can identify where someone else breaks the law, we are above such failings. Like the Pharisee we seek to justify ourselves.

The sad thing is that the Pharisee HAD DONE ALL THE RIGHT THINGS. He broke no commandment, fasted two days per week, gave up a tenth of his income. How many of us can say that? But he wasn't "justified," he just wasn't right in his relationship with God. Probably because he had placed all of his trust in himself, he had no need of God's mercy, God's help, of God.

A few years ago a writer wrote a scathing attack on the Lord's prayer in which he call it an act of childishness to call God "Father". I suspect that that writer was not a very mature person, there is nothing immature in acknowledging our dependence. God is the source of creation, the reason we exist, the power we find to grow and love, the hope we have for our future. It is childish to proclaim independence from everyone and everything, when any honest person will admit that we are frail, fragile creatures who only survive with the help of others.

The model of faith is the tax collector who knows that he is helpless on his own. He turns to God and finds all that he needs. When we discover that right relationship with God, we do the right things because our actions flow from our harmony with the Lord. Our actions go beyond mere requirements, we recognized that we are called to become like our God, we do that by showing mercy as the Lord shows mercy.

When we no longer judge, and size up, and measure other people by human standards we really have begun to imitate the love that God first gives us. The prayers of such people are surely heard.

A man came to the gates of heaven to be greeted by St. Peter. Peter asks the man if he can give a brief history of his life with an emphasis on the good deeds he had done in order to gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven. "You will need 1000 points to be admitted," Peter tells the man.

"This will be a cinch," the man thinks to himself, "I've been involved in church from the days of my youth." Then he begins to list his activities for Peter. He was an officer in his youth group, served in every possible position he could as a youngster. Was on the Parish Council and every committee the church had to offer. His list was extensive.

"Very impressive," Peter smiles at the man. An angel standing with them also smiled and nodded as he tallied the points and then whispered in Peter's ear. Peter tells the man, "This is quite striking -- we seldom see men of your very good works. You will be pleased to know that you have 327 points! Is there anything else you can think of?"

The poor soul breaks into a cold sweat and begins to reach deep for every single act of kindness he could think of. He listed them as the angel scratched furiously on his angelic clip board and nodded his head in admiration.

Peter looks at the clip board and says, "This is quite exceptional! You now have a total of 402 points. Can you think of anything else?" The distressed guy strives to recall good deeds -- like the time he helped a little old lady across the street. He finally arrives at a grand total of 431 points and cries out... "I am sunk! There is no hope for me! What more could I have done? O Lord, all I can do is beg for your mercy!"

"THAT," exclaims Peter, "Is a thousand points!"