

GLIMPSE

Praying Up

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Many serious words are spoken in church; wedding vows, Prayers of the Faithful at mass, parental correction of children, and even some Jesuit homilies now and then. There are also many humorous announcements such as the one I read lately. "The Weight Watchers meeting will take place this evening in the basement. Please use double doors."

A few years ago, at the parish where I celebrate weekend liturgies, a second collection was being taken after Communion. It was a Sunday morning and doughnuts and coffee were being offered after mass. It grew very quiet as the basket was being passed. All of a sudden a quite pained voice protested, "No Dad, that's for the doughnuts!" The quiet was delightfully interrupted and so was the collection. I was holding a collection-basket another time for the little folks to process up and drop off their envelopes. One smallish chap, after greeting me with, "Nice haircut", asked me if I get "half the winnings." Never a dull moment during collections.

While celebrating the Eucharist, at times I wonder what prayers, wordless or wordy, are being offered to God out in the pews. I have had the temptation to stop praying the words of the canon and just have everybody acknowledge out loud for what or whom were they thinking, remembering, praying just then. Would not that be a great liturgical event? I would never do that, but like most temptations, they're tempting.

We do pray as if God might be listening and we pray to render God benevolent and generous in our regard. I am sure that if each person did say out loud her/his deepest prayerful concern, the others in the community would nod their heads and say, "Good one, we'll pray for that as well." Does God hear our prayers or does God know our prayer? Why say words, why verbally announce our needs, worries, concerns and thanks, if God already is aware of them. God is aware of us!

There are residential communities around the world whose purpose is the forming of a loving community of Christian faith for Special-Needs adults. L'Arche, was founded by Jean Vanier in northern France over fifty years ago. I would often celebrate mass with the L'Arche community in Toronto. One day I asked Jean about how diligently I prepare the homily for the persons there, but do they hear what I am really sharing. He said, "Ah Larry, they hear your faith which, for them, is more important."

So God hears our faith wrapped up in our own special needs. God is not moved more deeply by our many words or the intensity of our emotions. God is moved by the Love that God is. God is praying within and around us so that our prayers are not heard exactly, but our faith in that Love renders us receptive to how God gives us our lives. This kind of prayer is serious and our listening to the prayers of our living is serious. What can make us laugh or smile is our images of God which life's events can create. There is no adequate image of God, but we are image-people. We deal with store clerks, pop machines, repair persons with whom we make requests, pay the fee and expect the proper response. We pray the price and God does not always respond accordingly. Why prayer then?

We pray as if we know what is ultimately good for us. Our verbal and silent prayers are admissions that we think we know. They ultimately are a statement of our human poverty and simplicity which we prefer would go away! That little fellow was in excited expectation of the fulfillment of the promise his dad made probably. "If you behave during mass, we will have doughnuts after." The little fellow put in his price of good behavior and it was pay-off time. We laughed at him, but we don't laugh much at how like him we are. It is only a glimpse, keep your praying up and your faith-hands open.