

Friday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 11,11-25): Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple area. He looked around at everything and, since it was already late, went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The next day as they were leaving Bethany he was hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, he went over to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves; it was not the time for figs. And he said to it in reply, “May no one ever eat of your fruit again!” And his disciples heard it.

They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written: My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples? But you have made it a den of thieves.” The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.

Early in the morning, as they were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered to its roots. Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Jesus said to them in reply, “Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it shall be done for him. Therefore I tell you, all that you

ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions.”

«All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it»

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Today, fruit and prayer are the key words to this Gospel. The Lord notices a fig tree and finds nothing but leaves: and He reacts by cursing it. According to St. Isidore of Seville, “fig” and “fruit” have the same root. Early next morning the Apostles, surprised, tell him: «Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered» (Mk 11:21). In reply, Jesus Christ speaks to them of faith and prayer: «Have faith in God» (Mk 11:22).

There are people that almost never pray and, when they do it, it is with the hope God will solve problems they do not know how to handle themselves. And they justify it with the words from Jesus we have just heard: «Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours» (Mk 11:24). They are right, and it is quite human, understandable and legitimate that, in front of a problem too difficult for us, we trust in God, in a much higher force.

But we must also add that prayers are “useless” («Your Father knows what you need before you ask him»: Mt 6:8), as long as they do not have a practical and direct utility, as —for instance— switch on a light. We do not receive anything for our prayer, because what we receive from God is grace upon grace.

Should we, therefore, not pray...? Of course, we should: now that we know that by prayer we obtain the grace, our prayer has become more worthy and valuable: because it is “useless” and it is “costless”. Furthermore, there are three benefits we do receive from the petition prayer: interior peace (to find our friend Jesus and to trust God is relaxing); to mull over a problem, rationalize it, and knowing how to raise it, is to solve half of it; and, in the third place, praying helps us to discern between what is good and what, maybe out of some personal whim, are the actual intentions of our prayers. Then, later on, we shall understand with the eyes of the faith what Jesus says: «Whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son» (Jn 14:13).

