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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

May 24, 2015

Faith in Prayer

*“Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged.”*

Luke 18:1 (Common English Bible)

I believe in prayer. I believe that prayer is the most important fact in the life of anyone who determines to follow Jesus. The trouble with prayer is not belief in the practice – it is what is expected from the practice. For many, prayer is practiced as some sort of holy magic. Pray correctly and with enough faith and the desired result arrives every time. Unanswered prayer is simply the result of praying incorrectly or with insufficient faith. This belief is troubling if not downright harmful to a person of faith. In this sentence from Luke’s Gospel, Jesus teaches that we are to “pray continuously.” Rather than suggesting yet another formula for prayer – pray continuously - I believe our Lord is inviting us to discover at least two ways that prayer is effective.

On one level, prayer opens the one who is praying to a relationship with God. Meaningful relationships are not built by one or two sentences that are shaped into a request, not with God or anyone else. “Continuous prayer” is the cultivation of a regular conversation with God. This is the kind of conversation found naturally between two people who care for one another. Whether we are angry or thankful, whether we are sharing from a broken heart or celebrating, we share continuously with those whom we love. Such conversations draw us closer to one another. It is that closeness with us that God desires.

A second level involves the one for whom we pray. By our prayers that person is not alone. Continuous prayer keeps them in the fellowship of our thoughts and in our hearts. A community of faith is created which liberates them from walking a difficult path unaccompanied by someone who cares. Encouragement and strength bubbles forth when we know that there is someone who is “pulling for us.” Creating community among people of faith is one result of continuous prayer.

Faith in prayer does not exclude expectations of the miraculous. God is still in the miracle business. But we are guilty of a grievous error when we reduce prayer to “getting what we want.” That makes God a dispenser of religious goods and services while we continue to build the life we want apart from God’s claim upon us. Christian prayer is always undergirded by a conviction that God is reconciling us to God’s self for the purposes of being used by God for God’s ongoing work in the world. “Continuous prayer” is an affirmation that our life is not ours to do as we wish. We belong to God and it is for God that we live.

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