

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: I saw an interesting article in the *Tribune* this week, entitled, “**Pink Sisters mark 100 years of prayer.**” It’s about a small order of Catholic nuns called the Holy Spirit Adoration sisters who devote themselves to prayer. They’re called the Pink Sisters because they wear rose-colored habits to symbolize the joy they feel in honoring the Holy Spirit. The article says they pray most of the day and will intercede for anyone, according to Sister Mary Angelica, “*no matter what their need may be.*” She said, “*We try to be as simple as possible so we can focus on the Lord. We are simple in everything, even meals—though on special occasions, we have ice cream.*” [by Natalie Pompilio, *Chicago Tribune* 12/29/15] It is an interesting connection: adoring the Holy Spirit and a life of prayer. Hold that thought.
- B. One of the most significant passages in the Bible for me this past year is the story of Martha, Mary and Jesus in Luke 10:38-42. Turn there. Remember how Jesus and his disciples came to the home of these two sisters and Martha was frustrated that instead of helping serve Jesus and his disciples, Mary “*sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.*” When Martha complained to Jesus he said in v.41, “*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.*” You see, Mary figured out that, even better than serving Jesus, was the privilege of having Jesus serve her.

So you read that and you might think, *How can I be like Mary?* The chapter break and the headings and everything make it difficult to see that Pastor Luke has ordered his book to answer that very question. **11:1** – “*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’*” What was it that Jesus’ disciples saw in his praying that they wanted to learn? I think it was his intimacy with his heavenly Father. He was with his Father

the way Mary had been at Jesus' feet. **Whether they realized it or not, the disciples wanted what Mary wanted.** And asking Jesus to teach them about prayer was the very best thing they could've asked. **Nothing we could do this year would be more important personally or as a church than learning from Jesus how to pray.**

- C. As it happened we began 2015 with a sermon about the importance of prayer. Now Jesus' teaching on prayer launches this new year. So Jesus taught them: **vv.2-4...**

Five basic prayer requests. We pray the first two for the Lord's sake and the last three for our sake. The first lesson of prayer is:

I. PRAY FOR THE CRUCIAL CONCERNS OF GOD'S HEART AND OURS (11:2-4)

- A. We begin, "*Father, hallowed be your name,*" because God's name is *not* held as holy, and we can do so little about that by ourselves. It's as though we ask God to build temples to himself where now there are pockets of resistance; to erect an altar of worship where now he is ignored. First in our own hearts and then in particular places where we go.
- B. Then, of equal concern, *Father, your kingdom come.* Matthew 5 adds the explanation of that: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Where do you see God's will being ignored? Where is God's will unknown? Pray into that. Because unless God acts nothing will change.

Why does Jesus have us pray these things? Why doesn't God just do them? Because we come to Jesus' feet, like Mary, when we own the concerns near to the heart of God. This is what a relationship with God looks like. And it works in both directions, for God wants to help us with the things most crucial to our lives as well.

- C. *Father, give us each day our daily bread.* This isn't only about bread, of course. It's medical bills and car repairs, strength to study and to parent, help with the sales call or the next company re-org. We pray because we recognize how dependent we are on God, but we also pray to forestall worry that saps our faith. **We put these daily pressures in**

God's hands so we don't fret, so we learn that we have a Father who cares for us.

- D. Then we pray about the matters that so often separate us from God. *Father, forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.* Nothing so threatens our lives as our sin. And once we've sinned we are helpless to dig ourselves out of the mess. So we pray for God's forgiveness—not only to release us from guilt but also to free us from the hold the sin has on us, from the poison in our souls, from the paralysis of our wills. We pray because God *does* forgive sins for Jesus' sake. And we pray so we remember that we are ourselves agents of grace to those who hurt and frustrate us.
- E. Finally, we pray about our path—our walk. *Father, lead us not into temptation.* God took Israel into the wilderness to test them, to see what was in their hearts. But they succumbed to sin and Satan at every turn. So we pray that God would “*lead us on paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*” Look at the path ahead of you this week. We pray that wherever we may walk, we would do so without being tempted to sin, lest we fail.

Why does Jesus have us pray these things? Because they draw us into the life he has for us with him. *He* wants us to trust him with our needs. He wants us to rely on his mercy. He wants us to let him guide our lives. Because we are in a relationship with him.

- F. If we do not pray for these things, not only won't they be given to us, but we will be like Martha, “*worried and distressed about many things*” while neglecting the one important thing in life—being with Jesus.

But Jesus' lesson isn't finished. **11:5-8...** The man in this story must—*must*—come up with food for his midnight guest. He cannot let his guest go hungry. He has nowhere to turn but to his neighbor. He knows he's pestering. But he knows his neighbor and friend can spare the bread. *Shameless audacity.* He just won't take no for an answer. The ESV translates this *impudence*. But what is the lesson Jesus is teaching about prayer?

II. PRAY FOR CRUCIAL CONCERNS WITH “SHAMELESS AUDACITY”

- A. Jesus has just given us a list of the five most crucial concerns to pray for. Now he tells us to pray for them like this man going to his neighbor at midnight.
- B. But the story adds a dimension: the man is fulfilling an obligation of hospitality. His midnight arrival needs food. When we must see someone fed, when some kind of gospel good *must* be done, and we have no resources, when we cannot handle it ourselves, we must wake the neighbor—we must go to God with “*shameless audacity*,” with *impudence* till we receive what is needed.
- C. This is a word for us as a church in our praying, for us as we each pray for our Guest List. Do not stop. Do not quit knocking on God’s door. **Pray with chutzpah!**
- D. **Why would God require us to pray this way?** Why not just give us what we need? God is certainly *not* reluctant nor is he bothered by our coming, no matter what the hour. When God waits and we must persist in prayer we come gradually to realize how deeply we need him, how nothing else will do but to have *him* open the door.

Jesus’ story leads him to this point: **vv.9-10...**

III. TO PRAY WITH “SHAMELESS AUDACITY” IS TO ASK, TO SEEK, AND TO KNOCK (11:9-10)

- A. Those words aren’t exactly synonyms. Jesus isn’t just saying, *Pray, pray, pray.* He uses three different miniature word pictures because all prayers are not the same.
 - 1. *Ask* is straightforward enough. To ask is to come to God our Father, to come to God as our Friend and Neighbor. It assumes we are welcome. That God is not stingy. *Illus.:* I’ve occasionally gotten a phone call, “*Hi Dad. I got kind of jammed up and I wonder if you could help.*” I listen and I help if it is wise because I love my son, and I *want* him to ask when he’s in trouble.
 - 2. *Seek* is prayer that is puzzling, pursuing, tracking. **To seek assumes that the answer was not immediate.** Here is prayer that is thinking hard, sifting. Sometimes we are seeking just what is the real request we ought to

pray for. Sometimes we are simply seeking God's timing or tuning; or even his very presence. *Lord, we do not know how we are supposed to go forward but we know you will lead us. We are not leaning on our own understanding but we do not yet have your understanding either, so we seek.*

3. Knock is that neighbor at midnight. Here is prayer at a closed door. *Lord, I'm still here. Knock, knock, knock. I need bread, Lord. Knock, knock, knock. I can't help him myself, Lord. Knock, knock, knock. Lord, I know the delay is not because you're sleeping or reluctant or uncaring. You told me to pray with shameless audacity, so here I am again. Knock, knock, knock.*
- B. Jesus is thinking, of course, of the kinds of prayers he just taught us to pray. There are some prayers that God will never grant, no matter how we pester him. He's too good and wise for such things. I'm sure you've noticed that sometimes our prayers morph as we persist. They become sharper, clearer, more important, more in line with the will of God.
- C. The point of each of these approaches is "*everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*" When we persistently ask, seek, and knock in keeping with the prayer requests Jesus taught us we will receive, find, and see the door open.

You might read that parable about the neighbor who doesn't want to get out of bed and wonder if God is like that. But here's the picture Jesus gives, the last point of his lesson: **vv.11-13...**

IV. IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT OUR FATHER WOULD DENY US ANY GOOD GIFT WHEN WE COME TO HIM IN PRAYER (11:11-13)

- A. God never poisons his provisions. He never acts unlovingly. *Illus.:* I cannot tell you how often I've visited with people who cannot imagine God would bless them, would bring good things into their lives. Usually, it is because they feel so unworthy. Sometimes it is because their own fathers were so harsh and stingy with kindness. Sometimes I'll pick out a good dad or mom they know in

church and say, “What *he* treat his kids the way you think God will treat you?” “Well, no, probably not,” they say. “Don’t you think God is at least as good a parent as he is?” I’ll ask.

We all realize that God allows—even brings—hard things into our lives. The Bible tells us that every good father disciplines his children. But God is never stingy. He will never serve you a snake or a scorpion. He will never violate your trust in him.

- B. I chose this passage for today because we’re beginning a series on the Holy Spirit. I’ve always been intrigued with this surprising twist in **v.13**, “*If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give **the Holy Spirit** to those who ask him?*” You don’t expect that little twist in the phrase. We expect, “*If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to you.*” And that is just what Jesus said another time, as recorded by Matthew.

So why the switch-up here? If we are to be like Mary—seeking the one thing in life that matters, the companionship of Jesus—then we must learn how to pray. We pray for the things most important to God’s heart and most important to our life with him. We pray for them with “shameless audacity”—we *ask, seek and knock*—and he *gives, shows, and opens the doors*. Because he is our loving Father who will never deny us what is good. And here’s the point: **in order to give us every good gift our Father comes to us himself.**

We pray, “*Father, hallowed be your name.*” And the Holy Spirit—the ***Holy hallowed*** Spirit—lives within us. “*Father, your kingdom come.*” And the Holy Spirit himself establishes his reign within our minds and hearts, and works out from us to the world around us. “*Father, give us each day our daily bread.*” And God says, “*I’ll bring it myself. I’ll feed you and give you enough for the friend who comes to you at midnight.*” When we pray, “*Father, forgive my sins,*” the Holy Spirit *within your own heart*

says “*Dear child, there is now no condemnation because you are in Christ Jesus. Go and sin no more.*” When we pray, “*Father, lead me not into temptation,*” he answers by the Holy Spirit *within us* sharpening our conscience, reminding us of Bible truth, by leading us into the company of those who help us. **The presence of the Holy Spirit himself is the answer to all our prayers.**

- C. To be like Mary, learn from Jesus how to pray. If our church is to be significant, if we are to be holy, if we are going to be and make disciples of Jesus, we need to pray. You may think I overemphasize this task, but I don’t think that is possible. Please pray well. Please come to *First, Prayer*. Please pray deeply and thoughtfully in your Growth Groups and homes.

Conclusion

For over 100 years, the Pink Sisters have been praying, every single day, all day, working in shifts. Holy Spirit Adoration sisters. They’ve been trying to recruit some new sisters. “*We want young ladies to see how beautiful the life is,*” said Sister Maria. Maybe, in our own way, we should join them.