**How to Pray (Matthew 6:5-8)**

 Prayer is a genuine connection with our Heavenly Father, and not an empty collection of religious sentences.

 Greetings dearly beloved on this Second Sunday of Lent, hoping that you are already examining yourselves and working on internal change for the better. Today we are talking about ways of prayer. How should one pray? What is characteristic of the prayers of God’s people? Why, additionally, do we need to be careful of some unhelpful prayer styles? Again, Prayer is a genuine connection with our Heavenly Father, and not an empty collection of religious sentences. Let us talk then about this indispensable topic.

 Genuine prayer is honest, which is not done for people, but for God. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks about three important subjects that were the pillars of the spiritual life of Jews. One was almsgiving, the second was the prayer life, and third was fasting. We are talking today about the second of these, which Jesus explains in order to clarify the purpose of any prayer. The Lord said to be careful of dramatic prayers which were done to attract the attention of an audience. Though prayers were generally not done in squares, it was possible to organize one’s spiritual life in such a way to allow for prayers to be done in public places to be seen by many people. That kind of showy acting would only have as its reward the audience that the actor wanted to have (and nothing in addition from God). Jesus says, “Go into your room.” By this He meant the specific room in the house, which was generally the storage area, and the only one which was capable of being locked. It had no window, and it was closed and locked to protect against thieves. It was there, in that most inner, secret place, that the Lord said to say prayers. There is no reason to speak long before the Lord. It is not necessary for a prayer to be long for it to be pleasing to the Lord, especially when we find ourselves in public. Better a few words and much silence, better a lot of listening to the Lord’s voice, than thousands of words poured out, and the driving away of God’s tangible presence with our own words… God knows the needs of His children – Jesus’ instructions are for believers not to resemble those that have made prayer into a showing-off session.

 In his *Confessions*, Augustine (the 4-5th century Church theologian) relates how he set out for Rome from Carthage against the prayers and entreaties of his godly mother, who was praying earnestly for his salvation. Augustine deceived her when she was weeping over him by telling her that he was merely going on board to see a friend who was sailing for Italy. When his mother refused to go home without him, he persuaded her to pass the night in a memorial chapel of the martyr Cyprian. But that night while his mother Monica was praying in the chapel, beseeching God to prevent him from going, Augustine set sail.

This departure of her son must have seemed to Monica at that time the refusal to grant her prayer; yet in the providence of God the journey to Italy was to be the means of Augustine's conversion. The denial of the mother's prayer was in the end a great answer to her prayer for the salvation of her gifted son. "But You," says Augustine, "in Your hidden wisdom, granted the substance of her desire, yet refused the thing she prayed for in order that You may effect in me what she was ever praying for…' She loved to keep me with her as mothers are wont, yes, far more than most mothers, and she knew not what joy You were preparing for her out of my desertion."

 Prayer, that genuine connection with our Heavenly Father, is a heartfelt conversation with Him. Sometimes it happens in a group setting – it happens much more often when we are alone, or with one or two people. If God heard a mother’s prayers by rejecting how she wanted her answer to come but simultaneously granted her request in a different way, He can do the same for us. True prayer is often not advertised or proclaimed. Sometimes a short prayer from the mind connects more with God than long prayers which crash into the sky and fall back down.

Therefore, let us pray from the heart, and let us not mechanically repeat words which are not ours or do not correspond without our inner life. May our prayers be directed to God alone, with awe and love, with respect and an attitude of worship. Again, genuine prayer is honest, done not for people, but for God. Prayer is a genuine connection with our Heavenly Father, and not an empty collection of religious sentences. May the Lord Bless You All. Amen.