



DOES GOD GRADE OUR PRAYERS?

—Are words important? --One of the core principles about prayer.

If you already noticed how kindergarteners respond at the sight of their daddy when he comes to pick them up at the end of school, then you know one of the core principles about prayer. Whatever you see in the heart and mind of a child when this child sees her/his father is exactly what God wants to see in your heart and mind, when you pray.

When small kids see their dad at the end of the day, they show many emotions and express different requests: “Daddy!”, “Yippee!”, “Let’s play on the swing, you push me!” Requests, questions, laughter, hugs and kisses ... You will not hear, “Dear Father, it is most gracious of Thee to come and pick me up. Please know of my deepest gratitude”. You will never hear formalities or pompous impressive vocabulary. You will just see and hear kids who are happy to see their daddy.

How does their response at the sight of their daddy compare to our response when we talk to the Lord?

God invites us to call Him “Daddy”. In history’s most famous prayer, “Our Father”, Jesus taught us to begin our prayers by saying “Our Father in Heaven”. A more specific translation would be “our Abba in Heaven”, an Aramaic word for father, used by Jesus and Paul to address God in a relation of personal intimacy. Abba is a tender, intimate, warm word; it is literally Daddy, Papa. Jesus invites us to come to God like a child come to his or her papa.

He said, *“Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven.”* (Matthew 18: 2-3.)

“And when you pray, be not like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” (Matthew 6:5) Religious leaders sometimes love to make a theatre out of their prayers... The show nauseated Jesus.

“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly... And do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matthew 6:6-7)

God likes to talk in private, He is low on fancy, He is high on accessibility. No chapel necessary, no cathedral required. If you want to go to the Vatican or Jerusalem or Mecca for prayer, go ahead but prayers at home carry as much weight as prayers at Rome or anywhere else. Because the One who hears them is your daddy, your papa. So you don’t have to woo Him with location, or with eloquence. When you pray, don’t be like these people who don’t know God and continue saying things that don’t mean anything and use many words.... *“For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”*

In fact, Jesus downplays the importance of words. No religion does this. Every religion places the emphasis on the right words and/or the abundance of words. Jesus, by contrast, places the emphasis on the One who hears the prayer and the heart that says the prayer.

Hindu and Buddhist prayers depend on the proper repetitions of mantras, sounds, words and syllables, as if the power of the prayer lies in the recital of the prayer. Muslim prayers are very impressive and must be properly recited at each of the 5 appointed times during the day. Even certain branches of Christian faith highlight certain prayer language or prayer chants, or holy prayer terminology. Against all this emphasis on syllables and chatter, Jesus says, “Don’t be like the people who use many words.”

You see, with God, it is not the quantity or the eloquence or the repetition of words that matters, but the sincerity.--Just like it does not take many words from our kids to touch our hearts as parents.

Sometimes one word is all you have. Sometimes life is so hard, the day is so long, the pressure is so abundant, that all you can muster is “Oh Father!” And that’s all it takes! Prayer is not graded according to style, God does not dismiss your request because it was poorly worded. The right heart who addresses a Father in Heaven cannot pray wrong.

So try this: when you pray, just find a quiet corner, take whatever posture works the best for you and press the pause button in your life; and come as a child.

God says, “I will be a Father to you and you will be My sons and daughters.” (2 Corinthians 6:18)

Has it been a while since you spoke to your Father who is in Heaven?