

Take-Home: Deep-Dive, Does Prayer Do Anything?

WHAT WE FOUND

We conceded what honesty requires: if prayer were a vending machine, the machine finds no support, in the research or in our own histories. Then we found that Scripture never sold it. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him, Jesus says, and commands asking anyway, so asking is never for God's information; it is for the asker and the friendship, and through it God freely wills to give real goods, sometimes otherwise than asked. The New Testament's two most famous petitions not granted as asked belong to Jesus and Paul: the cup not removed, though the prayer itself was heard (Hebrews 5:7), the thorn not taken, and in both cases what was given was greater: the Father's will embraced and death itself defeated; grace sufficient and power made perfect in weakness. Prayer is communion that changes the one praying, in which the Spirit himself intercedes with sighs too deep for words, and petition stays real inside it: pour out your heart before him.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

From his *Letter to Proba*, in substance: God does not need our asking to know our needs; he wills our asking to enlarge our desire, until we can hold what he is preparing to give. Delay can be the stretching of the vessel. And as the Catechism quotes him: man is a beggar before God.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Describing contemplative prayer in her *Life*, in the passage the Catechism quotes at CCC 2709: nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends, taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. Its heart is friendship, not outcomes.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. MONICA

As her son tells it in the *Confessions* (Book III): many years of tearful, apparently unanswered prayer for his conversion, and a bishop's assurance that the son of those tears could not perish. She asked for a conversion; she was given a Doctor of the Church.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray one honest sentence to God each day this week, in your own words, Psalm 62:8 style; the Church's vocal prayers, the Our Father above all, remain fully commended, and this week's exercise is simply your own sentence. If you are unsure he is there, say that; it counts.
- Once this week, take your oldest unanswered prayer and pray it one more time, ending with Gethsemane's second clause, not my will, but yours, be done, and notice what saying that clause costs and gives.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9 (RSV2CE)

GOING FURTHER

Pray one psalm a day for a week, chosen at random, and keep count of how many kinds of speech to God the Psalter turns out to permit.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 2559; 2725; 2735 to 2741; 2709.