

Have you ever noticed that there is an order to creation? That certain effects come only from certain causes. For instance: that there is no harvest without the sowing of seed; there is no music without sound; no communication without a type of language; no deep family life without the practice of virtue; no spiritual life without prayer; no vision without illumination; no creation without a creator; no children without parents, etc. Why? Mere accident? No! By no means! God has decreed, or in some cases permitted, from all eternity that certain effects be brought about by specific causes. God knows everything all in one act of knowing. He should, he thought things into being.

What does this mean for prayer if God is unchangeable? It means that true prayer has its source not in us but in God. Prayer is not an effort to compel God to bend to our will and desires. Before we ever decided to pray, it was willed by God from all eternity not only to be answered but also to be a great benefit for our own spiritual life. Basically, it also is a means of obtaining the necessary graces that are specifically intended for us so that we get to Heaven. It would be unwise to think that our prayers brought something 'new' to God that He did not know before and that our prayers can change what He has willed. If God did not foresee or will/desire from all eternity all prayers that we would address to Him during our lives, then what kind of a God is that? Not God at all! Why did Jesus say, 'ask and it shall be given you...'? Since God has willed it, all true prayer is infallibly and infinitely efficacious (effective). Infallible and efficacious not only in the result prayed for but the manner *in* which it was asked and comes to pass, the causes that bring about the event, and the means *by* which the result is attained. Now, go back to the comment at the beginning of this article: God - from the lowest order of creation to the highest level of the supernatural order of Grace - God, has in view the coming about of specific effects and has prepared the necessary causes and means to attain them. In the spiritual order, prayer is just as much a destined cause from all eternity by Providence to produce a specific effect (the realization of the gifts of God that are necessary for going to Heaven), as the rain and the sun in the material order are causes that from all eternity are destined to produce the effects of our everyday experience. This is why the perfect prayer is 'Thy Will be done...' by doing so one lovingly and trustingly submits to the Divine Governance of creation, knowing full well that all things work for the good for those who love God (because the Holy Trinity desires our salvation, but we have to respond - love admits of no manipulation or coercion). Reflecting on this, one can begin to see that everything that we have has been given to us, *everything*: our existence, health, desire for goodness, intellect, strength (physical and spiritual), kindness of heart, moral character, successes, desire to pray and prayers we utter- are all gifts of Providence! Therefore, when we ask God in the spirit of faith for something, knowing that we are participants in His Providence, that prayer is elicited by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, what we pray for is in conformity with the Divine Will. We co-operate in the Divine Governance, which orders the world. At times it may seem like God submits to our whimsical desires, but the opposite is true. By grace and humble submission to God, our will has been caught up and made to 'synchronize' with God's will. When we pray in such a way, we desire in time what God wills from all eternity. So, the more we pray in conformity with what God wills the more we co-operate in Divine Governance. In a certain sense, we are privileged to be able to be partners with God in Salvation. Consider conversions. Certainly, it is God who gave to the convert the illumination and strength and consolation for which we prayed; yet from even before we were born God decided to produce said effect only with our cooperation and as a result of our intercession (not that God needs our help, He doesn't). Also, we mustn't become scrupulous of the great privilege and responsibility with which we have been entrusted. We must trustingly pray that we do all that God desires. In doing so we cause, in a certain sense, what has been Divinely decreed to be the effects from our prayers to bear fruit. Consider the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30). God knows and loves us, so He never asks from us more than the grace He gives us can produce with our cooperation.

Sometimes our prayers are not heard, particularly when they are not free of self-interest, or seeking something temporal rather than as useful for salvation. Remember Matthew 6:33 "seek *first* the kingdom of God..." Other times when our prayers are seemingly not heard, it is so that we might persevere in prayer and grow more and more aware of our complete and utter dependence on God. Another question to ask regarding unanswered prayer, is: is this thing I pray for the only time that I search out God? Is this being permitted that I might go to Him more? Would I still run to Him with the same ardor and zeal with a matter that wasn't as serious or life-changing? Do I adore, worship, give thanks, make acts of love and faith with the same ardor and zeal that I have when I ask for a miracle? Do I ask for the things that are necessary for my salvation or my loved ones, or those whose paths I cross? Do I pray to be transformed into a living image of Christ for the world?

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