

THE THING IS....

PRAYER

DO YOU BELIEVE IN ASKING GOD TO INTERVENE IN YOUR LIFE, IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS, OR IN THE LIFE OF THE WORLD?

Everyone is welcome to come and discuss this interesting question on Wednesday at 1.15 in Fr Philip's Office (Block C, Cherry Tree Buildings). Bring a sandwich, and we'll put the kettle on.

The idea of this group is to come to an informed view on questions of faith. We would like to hear what the Word of God says, what the Church says, and what you say. Here are a few pointers to help you reflect.

1. We call God *omniscient*. He already knows it all. In praying for his help, are we presuming to inform him of something he has failed to notice for himself? We call him *the highest Good*; no-one can teach him to be kind. In praying for something we see as good, do we presume to suggest a kind of love he has overlooked? What exactly is the point of this dialogue? Does God ever change his mind, or alter the course of events, because we ask?

2. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prays: *Father...let this Cup* (i.e. his death) *pass me by; but let your will, not mine, be done*. Here is a prayer that expressly includes the possibility of its own refusal!

Does all prayer operate under that condition?

3. "Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Is it not precisely in the desires fighting inside your own self? You want something you haven't got, so you're prepared to kill for it. You have an ambition you cannot satisfy, so you fight to get your way by force. It is because you do not pray that you do not receive; when you do pray and do not receive, it is because you have prayed wrongly, wanting to indulge your own passions." *James 4:1-3*

4. "Since for the present you are unable to see, let your efforts consist in *desire*. The whole life of a Christian is a holy desire. What you desire you cannot see yet. But the desire gives you the capacity, so that when it does happen that you can see, you may be fulfilled. Suppose you want to fill some sort of bag, and you know the bulk of what you will be given: you stretch the bag, or sack... You know how big the object is that you want to put in, and you see that the bag is narrow; so you increase the capacity by stretching it. In the same way by delaying the fulfilment of desire God stretches it, by making us desire he expands the soul, and by this expansion he increases its capacity.

"Then let us desire; because we are to be fulfilled." *St Augustine on 1 John*.

5. "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives, the one who searches always finds, the one who knocks will always have the door opened."
Matt 7:7-8

6. "The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence in which they can rightly be desired. This prayer teaches us not only to ask for things, but also the order in which we should desire them." *St Thomas Aquinas*

7. "The Lord's Prayer is truly the summary of the whole Gospel. Since the Lord, in handing over the practice of prayer, said elsewhere '*Ask and you shall receive*', and since everyone has petitions that are peculiar to his own circumstances, the Lord's Prayer is regularly and appropriately said first, as the foundation of all future desires." *Tertullian On Prayer*