

Views on Prayer

I have discovered some interesting things about people's outlook about communication with the divine. Prayer comes in many flavors from the sublime to, well here are some others.

Sports Prayer:

I was a decent baseball player in my youth. Playing second base, the "good-field-no-hit" position, at a fine Catholic high school in Napa, California, I was terrified of the next great event. We were playing another fine Catholic high school. It was the last of the ninth, bases loaded, score tied, two outs. 3 and 2 on the batter. Our best relief pitcher was on the mound, undefeated this year, staring intently at the mystical signals our catcher was flashing. He shook off the first signal, a fast ball. He shook his head violently at the second offering, a curve ball. The a nod...a slider, his best pitch.

Meanwhile, the batter, their cleanup hitter, leading the league in home runs, RBIs, runs, runs scored, hits, a.455 batting average, stood menacingly, bat just behind his ear just waiting to be unleashed, glowering at the nervous twitchings of our pitcher.

The windup, the.....and then it happened. Our pitcher made the sign of the cross. The batter made the sign of the cross. Who's sign was to be preferred by the Creator. Christian Brother's or Jesuits, which would be God's righteous choice?.....the pitch.....

Prayer Accelerators:

My neighbor, a fine young man with many children, met me in the street a couple of weeks ago. My Spanish, though hardly worthy of praise, is sufficient to get along...*a bastante para vivir*. We exchanged pleasantries about this and that. I mentioned that it was just too hot and there was so much dust. He looked at me mischievously, and said.

"We must pray to San Antonio for rain."

I told him I would do as he suggested. That night there was a huge electrical storm, thunder and lightning, torrential rain. The next morning, dry again and cool, my neighbor asked me if I had prayed to San Antonio as requested. I nodded in affirmation.

“Ease back a little on the prayers,” he said, “Last night was overkill” or words to that effect.

What an interesting idea, I thought. A prayer accelerator like a car. Throttle up, more rain. Ease off, less rain. Noah must have had a turbo charged prayer mechanism in this interpretation.

Altitude Prayer:

Some time ago I tried to tell a friend what it was like to trek in the Andes at 15,000 feet, those splendid, mysterious mountains and glaciers. The Quechwa Indians, descendents of the mighty Inca civilization, retain reverence for the mountain gods to this day, I explained. He responded with a look of admiration and envy. “I hope you said a prayer for me while you were there,” he said. “You were closer to God than I was,”

That got me to thinking about elevation having something to do with the efficacy of praying. Were astronauts more likely to have their prayers answered than the average sea level person? Prayers often mention “up there” after all. But I basically forgot all about this issue until one day when I picked up an art book belonging to my wife, with photographs of paintings in the Louvre and Vatican museums portraying the pious positions of famous saints. Sure enough they were all looking “up”, halos glistening while they communed with the Almighty. Maybe there’s something to it, I thought, tethering my skepticism.

Prayer and Science:

One day while I was praying, I pictured a person standing on the opposite side of the planet, also praying. Would prayers go in opposite directions, maybe even cancel themselves out. Could there be an “anti-prayer” with much the same characteristics of matter? “Ah Hah,” I exclaimed, presuming prayer transmitters might be similar to radio waves, going out in concentric circles. And after all, Einstein’s Special Law of Relativity might be in effect.

Prayer Hierarchies:

I have a friend, Melvin, who is addicted to many things: drugs, alcohol, eating, puns...yes, puns...and he has joined the various 12 step programs who help him in these things. He has 12 addictions so twelve different sponsors. They

all have different views as to what a “Higher Power” might be so he spends a lot of time praying to a lot of different concepts. But he’s off easy compared to my friend Alberto who is an Aztec descendent. He is afraid to tick off one of his gods so he spends all day praying to all 136 gods, even the minor ones like the god of itchy scalp.

So there you have it. Prayer comes in many flavors, and as my friend Urban is fond of saying, “They can’t hurt.”