

## Thursday, First Week of Lent

*Esther 4:29-42 Matthew 7:7-12*

### PRAYER OF PETITION

To some extent it is true that we pray best when we are in need. The prayer of petition has always been a significant form of prayer for us Christians. The first reading from the book of Esther today is a powerful prayer of petition. Esther prays to God out of a sense of deep distress and isolation: *'Reveal yourself in the time of our distress... for I am alone and have none but you, Lord'*. When we are in acute need we petition God with the greatest urgency. The really difficult moments in life reveal to us our vulnerability, our need for help beyond ourselves. In the gospel reading, Jesus encourages us to ask, to search, to knock on the door. He encourages us to petition God, not just when our need is desperate but at all times. Many of us will have had the experience of our prayers of petition not being answered. Our Lord is giving us a hint on how God responds to our prayers. He will not necessarily fulfil our expectations and longings, but he will for sure give what the gospel reading calls *'good things'* to those who petition him in prayer. Thus, when we make a prayer of petition, we should be open to the good things that God is prepared to put in our way. We have to keep on asking, searching, knocking, trusting that in doing so we are giving the Lord space to work in our lives and to give some good things. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus petitioned God to take this cup of suffering from him. He did not stop at that, but he added: *'yet not my will, but yours be done.'* It is important to surrender to the unexpected ways in which God responds to our prayers.

In our prayer of petition we also ought to be aware of the needs of others. We see Jesus at the last supper telling Peter that he has been praying for him, petitioning God that Peter's faith may not fail. Even from the cross he prayed for those who were crucifying him, petitioning God to forgive them.

Good things from God will always come to us when we pray, because in prayer we allow ourselves to be touched by God's grace.