

Power of Prayer Eighth Week in Ordinary Time Friday, May 27, 2016 8:15 AM
1 Pt 4:7-13; **Mk 11:11-26** (St. Augustine of Canterbury, bishop) (Those who belong to the kingdom bear fruit all the time. All the obstacles in our way to God can be removed.)

Well, this is a rather lengthy reading and it contains the basic text for several different teachings. But as it ends here it is about **the power of prayer**.

Now in a way even the cleansing of the Temple is about the power of prayer: **“My Father’s house is to be a house of prayer for all people. You have made it a den of thieves.”** Well, that of course, “den of thieves,” is a quotation from one of the prophets. A den is a hiding place; thieves are those who steal. And the implication is that the temple system, sacrificial system, was really depriving people, making them pay for sacrifices, which is supposed to be free offerings of the heart and mind. So it is about how **some rituals can supplant the power of prayer**, or try to; and that itself is wrong. And not only is it wrong in this case in theory, but in practice it’s also **a form of thievery because poor people who don’t know better are coming and paying their shekels to buy these animals.**

Whereas Jesus’ point is real prayer is something else again. He himself embodies what is the true notion of sacrifice: **offering to God one’s heart, mind, and soul, which is also very closely allied with true prayer, lifting up to God one’s heart, mind, and soul.** This doesn’t make ritual bad, but it explains how ritual must be done, in what spirit, in a spirit of attention to what is being meant, not something that has power in itself. **So this is all about the power of uniting oneself to God in prayer and in sacrifice.**

Now the story of the fig tree is everyone admits rather odd. But everything that’s odd is always met in some sort of metaphorical sense. Jesus in the Fourth Gospel speaks about the vine and the branches and how the Father will prune the vine of barren branches. Here is a barren fig tree. In a way it wasn’t its fault for being barren; it wasn’t the time for fruit. Nonetheless

fruitfulness is what the kingdom is about, in season, out of season. The kingdom of God doesn't respond to what we call the seasons, the times of the year. The kingdom of God is for all time. **Those who belong to the kingdom bear fruit all the time,** not just in summer, but all the time.

Meanwhile **the power of prayer will remove all obstacles.** Obstacles to what? To our march toward God, whatever you want to call them, whatever they are, **they are mountains.** They can be removed. We might think they are too big, too high, too broad. We can't climb them. We cannot circumvent them—true. We can remove them. That's what prayer is about: **all the obstacles in our way to God can be removed. And to live with a confidence in that kind of power is essential to a disciple.** If we think that our path to God can be thwarted by circumstances in this world, well, what kind of disciples are we going to be? That's what this is about.