Day by day, dear Lord, Of you three things I pray: To see you more clearly, Love you more dearly, Follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

If my prayer sounds familiar, you may recall it from the musical, “Godspell.” Or you may have read Frederick Borsh’s book, “Day by Day, Loving God More Dearly.”

I credit both sources because I remember “Godspell,” in fact I remember most Broadway plays, because when I was young and poor and living in New York City I saw every play on Broadway…free.

You see, they don’t check tickets when you return to the theatre after the intermission. And most New Yorkers are so sophisticated they only need to see the first act. That allowed poor students and starving writers to keep up with theatre.

But that was before I came to know God more dearly.

My second source is more noble. Last Christmas, my “big sister and rabbi,” Betsy Anderson, gave me a copy of Borsh’s book. Trust Betsy to give me just the right book on prayer to help me to find a meaningful insight into today’s Gospel.

I discovered that the writers of “Godspell” were, in fact, influenced by Saint Richard’s Prayer. That is, the prayer that Richard of Chichester, a thirteenth-century bishop, was heard saying on his deathbed:

“Thanks be to you, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me, O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly (Borsch “Day by Day,” p. 2).”

Richard’s friends continued his prayer to see, to love, and to follow the Lord in their own lives, adding the phrases, “day by day, three things I pray.”
This saint’s biography is a portrait of someone who spent his life seeking to know God. He is remembered for his humility, his perseverance, and the strength and generosity of his faith. He inspired everyone who knew him because of his deep love for God and neighbor. He gave particular care to the poor, to widows, to orphans and those who were sick.

Richard was a man of prayer. Early visitors to his chapel would find him already there, having spent the night in prayer. People sensed in him an inner consecration of life. How did he become this way?

Scholars believe that his prayer informed and shaped his life. “To see God more clearly,” Richard studied philosophy at Oxford and the University of Paris. He also sought God in the study of Canon Law that, in addition to regulating every detail of daily life in medieval society, had a focus on justice for the poor and needy.

“To love God more dearly,” Richard left academia and devoted his entire life to God. He was ordained a deacon, a priest and later became bishop. Thomas Aquinas joined his order, the Dominicans, during this period and his writings contributed greatly to Richard’s understanding and love of God.

“To follow God more nearly,” Richard remembered Jesus instruction to his first disciples to “come, follow me,” and applied that invitation to his life. In everything he did, he attempted to “follow Jesus in God’s ways of love and service to others.”

Truly, Richard spent his life striving to love God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, and with all his mind; and his neighbor as himself. (Luke 10: 27-28).

So you may be asking, “What does this have to do with “The Lord’s Prayer?” Context.

Richard’s life puts prayer in context and that is what Jesus was teaching his disciples when they asked him how to pray.

You see, prayer in its broadest sense, means the raising of the heart to God (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford 2005, p. 1324).
It was immediately after Jesus had raised his heart to his heavenly father that one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Jesus taught them, and teaches us, that prayer is ultimately the worship of God as Father, acknowledging God’s holiness and devoting ourselves to the coming of God’s kingdom.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus was not trying to give his disciples “magic words” to say. But through these words and parables Jesus taught them about the nature of God. And he emphasized that when they pray, they pray to God as their heavenly Father.

The petitions are a blueprint for what we should ask for in prayer:
- Give us our daily bread— the things we need to sustain ourselves—as the Jews were sustained in the desert by manna
- Forgive us our sins as we forgive others. God provides for our physical needs and also heals our brokenness. However, we must offer forgiveness to one another as well. By doing so, we open a new way of being in relationship with God and others.
- in the final petition we ask God’s grace to withstand the trials and temptations that come to us.

This prayer is about opening ourselves to God as Jesus himself did, for through Jesus, God has already reached out to draw us into the Kingdom.

The parable of the neighbor teaches us that God is reliable, arguing that if a neighbor will get up in the middle of the night to answer one’s need, how much more can we count on God’s readiness to answer our call to help. This parable also teaches a lesson on persistency. In other words, if you are serious about your request, keep praying.

The parables of the parent and the child give us confidence in the knowledge that God’s goodness is greater than that of any human parent.

Now to be truly effective in prayer we need to know ourselves too. We need to be aware of our limitations and our egos. The truth is we are totally dependent on God—to draw our next breathe, to love more deeply and to make something of our lives. It all comes from God’s grace.
Imagine your relationship with God as a partnership, all right, so he’s a senior partner. But he’s the most powerful partner you could ever have… and what a client list.

The Lord’s Prayer offers us the assurance that ours is a God who gives, opens, and allows us to find. The danger comes when we treat our prayers as a blank check to ask for anything our hearts desire.

Jesus assured his disciples that God answers prayer, but he did not guarantee that they would receive whatever they requested. We may be anxious about the necessities of life, but Jesus calls us to a higher pursuit: “Seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well… for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:31-32). Our praying should be consistent with our seeking. Then, when we pray as Jesus taught us, the assurance that God answers is hardly needed.

I want to share with you a profound lesson in prayer that I learned a few years ago in South Africa. I was there on a self-directed study to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Diocesan Companion Program, where bishops of the Global North and the Global South choose a companion diocese to work together and share their faith to the glory of God.

I examined the relationship between the Diocese of Cape Town and the Diocese of Washington to learn what worked and what didn’t work, to understand the dynamics of this relationship so that if God ever called me to participate in such a mission I would be in a better position to make it work for both parties.

When I finished my research I ventured up the Cape to Grahamstown to spend time with the Anglican Benedictine brothers. I observed there a true Christian community that was based on love for God and all of God’s people. And I asked Brother Timothy, the abbey prior, how he and three other American brothers found their mission in South Africa.

He told me that Bishop Tutu invited them to come during Apartheid because he wanted a center of prayer in the center of the region where some of the greatest atrocities against humankind had been committed. They were simply asked to come and pray.
And pray they did, every day they went out to the side of the mountain and prayed. Brother Timothy told me that they prayed and prayed until their hearts were filled with joy. And when their hearts overflowed their mission came to them…

One day, during their prayers, they heard the screech of train’s breaks near their community. They got up from their prayers and ran to the scene where three children had been playing on the tracks. Two of those children were killed so the brothers did what any “good Samaritan” would do they called for help, contacted the parents and took them to the hospital to identify the broken bodies of their sons.

Days later they attended their funeral, but found that everyone there was in shock. You see, no one of European decent had ever attended their church before. I asked Brother Timothy what he did and he told me he simply stood up and jump-started the service with the words, “Let us pray.”

The good people of Grahamstown decided that day that these brothers were ok and began to come to them for help in schooling their children, in defending their men from false arrests and in assisting their women with the development of a cottage industry that would put shoes on their children, food on their table and medicine when they needed it. A full and loving community in Christ developed from those prayers to know God’s will for their lives.

So this is my wish for you, my beloved: that you come to know God your father more intimately by raising your heart to him on a regular basis. Take the time to quietly be with him. Share your feelings, your joys and your concerns. By seeking his will in your life you will find that God is both more intelligent and more creative than you are.

And try not to be too specific in your prayers, you will limit yourself. And when you finish praying, keep your heart open to God. His still, small voice will come to you in the most unusual ways.

Pray, until your heart is full of joy and when it overflows, you too will experience the Kingdom of God.

Amen.