

The disciples, it seems, doubted that God was good. God is so good, Jesus says today, that if you ask for something you'll get it, like kids receiving from parents. God knows even more how to make us children happy. So, Jesus says, just ask, and you'll receive.

Now, if you've had any experience in the prayer department, you know that what Jesus says here isn't entirely precise. Sometimes you ask and ask and ask for something, and you don't get it. But of course kids don't always get what they want because parents know best.

There's another reason why Jesus' saying isn't entirely precise. He says God gives when you ask, but sometimes God gives even when you don't ask at all. Several months ago Msgr. James Comiskey told me he planned to retire from the cathedral in Lubbock, Texas, and to spend a few months in Kansas City with family and friends. He offered to do parish work just for that opportunity. I said, not quite seriously, "That means I could take a sabbatical." Msgr. said, very seriously, "Yes, Paul, that's what that means." So I asked Bishop Boland; he said, "Hard to argue with that." I consulted a friend who teaches at Notre Dame. He said, "Come here; I'm going on sabbatical this fall; you can use my apartment." About that time an editor told me she was searching for an author to write a history of the catechumenate; she said I was the publisher's first choice. So I wrote to the University of Notre Dame and they appointed me Visiting Scholar for the fall semester, which gives me the privileges of a faculty member--an ID card, full use of the library, and the workout room, but I don't have to teach. I told my friend there everyone's asking, "Will you have football tickets?" He said, "I just got the renewal notice for my two season tickets. If you pay for them, they're yours." So within the space of a few months, I received a sabbatical approved by the bishop, a project to work on, a place to stay, someone to cover for me here, and Notre Dame football season tickets, none of which I asked for, all of which I received. I still can't figure out why there's a shortage of vocations to the priesthood.

It doesn't always happen this way in life, but I do believe God gives everybody perks. You fall in love when you weren't expecting it; you conceive a beautiful child you hadn't planned; out of the blue someone sends you flowers; you receive a card from an old friend; or you hear a compliment--all without asking for it. We're quick to criticize God for not answering our prayers, and slow to thank God for giving us what we never dared hope for.

On Thursday, Msgr. Comiskey will become the administrator of St. Regis Parish, that is the title Bishop Boland is assigning him; canon law provides that status for the priest leader in cases like this; I will retain the title pastor of St. Regis while I'm away. When I return at Christmas I'll resume my work as pastor here, and Msgr. Comiskey can stop being administrator and start being retired. I am very grateful to Msgr. for his generous offer to come here and I wish him every blessing in his work and his rest. I am grateful to our staff and volunteers who will keep the ministry of the parish alive. I am grateful to all of you for the faith and the charity you have shown me. I'm also grateful to God, whose goodness I cannot doubt. Let's keep one another in prayer. I'll see you here Christmas Eve.

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