After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles had to change their minds about what to do next. At first they proclaimed the gospel to other Jews. Then some of them, notably Paul and Barnabas, met success while preaching to the Gentiles. Other apostles thought the Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians. The disagreement became so sharp that they convened in Jerusalem to work it out. Today's first reading reveals their decision, preserved in a letter composed for the Gentile Christians in several major cities. The apostles applied some rules regarding marriage and meals, but beyond that, no unnecessary burden. That letter kicked open the door for the spread of the gospel. But some apostles had to change their minds to make it happen.

To follow this reading we sang from Psalm 67 with the refrain, "O God, let all the nations praise you!" This psalm offers a model for praying if we're willing to change our minds about what we want. We commonly pray for our own welfare and the good of those we love. We may pray for healing, for a better job, or success in our personal efforts. Surely, God loves to hear these prayers, but Psalm 67 opens our view wider.

It begins with a line to which we can all relate: "May God be gracious and bless us." You can fill in whatever particular blessing you want God be gracious about. Then the psalm tells God what will result if we get the blessing we want. The obvious result would be something like, "I'll be happy, and God will feel good about it." Instead, the psalm continues with this argument: "So will your ways be known upon earth and all nations learn your salvation." If I get the blessing I want, people all over the world will learn this about God—he grants favors. God's reputation improves. The psalm concludes, "May God still give us his blessing that all the ends of the earth may revere him."

Our duty to pray does not focus only on personal needs, but on those of the world. Surely a loving God wants to rescue us in times of personal stress, but prayer invites us into a larger hope. We want God's reputation to spread so that all may praise him. This was the insight the apostles gained: Many of them had one vision of how the faith would spread, but they had to think bigger. They lifted their concerns above winning a personal argument to learning what God wanted them to do. They changed their minds and adopted a larger vision, so that, as Psalm 67 says, all the nations could revere the Lord. Sometimes our prayer and our arguments need a reboot to focus on God's perspective, not our own.

It's fine to pray for specific blessings. We often have keen insight into what would make life better. But praying for personal advancement may not be as effective as praying for divine advancement. When we pray for someone's health, we may tell God how granting the prayer will benefit not just that person, but all others who will learn the salvation of God and bring praise to him. Still, that kind of praying means being ready to change one's mind. Sometimes what benefits God and others is not what we first think would benefit us. But in the end, in spite of our strongest held opinions, it usually does.