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Please

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Please

When we make pleas of any kind, we are usually under duress and often filled with concerns for ourselves arising from our neediness. When we say "please" in making a request, the focus moves beyond us, and takes into account our relationship with the persons we are asking, no matter how little or well we know them. And in asking with "please," we acknowledge the freedom and dignity of the other persons, which is essential in truly human interactions. We are not required to make courteous requests where our rights are involved, as when we purchase items in a store. But the transactions between humans are different than when we pay at an automated kiosk, rightly expecting to receive exactly what we purchased. When persons are involved, and we acknowledge the value of the others' efforts even in simple business exchanges, we not only receive whatever was agreed upon, but we also deepen the qualities that enhance our humanity. We become more self-respectful as we respect others.

When we relate with God, and add to our prayers the quality of "please," even if we do not use the actual word, we acknowledge that God is someone, not an automated dispenser of whatever we happen to need or want. In making our requests personal, we attend to the relationship with God as at least implicitly more important than whatever we might seek. Though we might begin asking with the focus of attention on our needs, our "please" helps us to engage in an honest and interactive conversation. We become aware of the importance of trusting God, so that in this kind of prayer, we always receive what we really need.

When, as children, we were taught to say "please," the practice might have seemed to us as an unnecessary addition to stating what we wanted, but practically useful if using the word helped us receive a favorable answer. We now know that when we are sincere in asking rather than demanding, we please people with our approach: we convey respect and care for the persons of whom we make our requests, engaging in a pleasing interaction rather than with a mechanical approach. "Please," in our communications with one another, fulfills some of the deepest requirements of satisfactory human relationships.

In prayer, we certainly are pleasing to God when our attitude, in asking or conveying our desires, includes appreciation for God's absolute freedom to love us in the manner that God chooses. We do not like to receive implicit demands from anyone, as it appears to us as demeaning. We are far more responsive to others when our freedom is properly valued. God loves us completely, but we are incapable of receiving what we really need if we let ourselves imagine that God is somehow obligated to respond as we desire.

Trust is based on our belief that God loves us and will do what is best for us, just as we expect others whom we trust to act out of love in whatever they say or do in answer to our appeals.

In relationships, "please" epitomizes one of our most beautiful characteristics.