288 To Seek (*Petere*)

Here it is to be noted that certain ones neither seek nor accept, as those despairing. Others seek and accept, as the mercenary does for glory. Some seek not and yet accept, as Paulus did for grace. Some seek and not accept, as the mother of the sons of Zebedee [Matt. 20:20-28] and Paul [Rom. 16:13].

¶ When therefore many even the saints are found in seeking, they are not heard, what is that said in John 16[:24]: “Ask, and you shall receive.” To this it is said that they sought imprudently, as James in his epistle, chapter 4[:3]: “You ask and receive not; because you ask amiss.” Therefore, to this that seeking he may receive that which is sought, four things are required, namely, that on the part of the seeker that he be humble, can receive, suitability, and the need on the part of the thing sought. So, conformity and convenience on the part of the manner in seeking is sedulity and diligence, on the part of that one from whom it is sought thus the power of benevolence.

Concerning the first, it is required that the one seeking be disposed, that is, out of mortal sin or perhaps infirm with a proposal of having the sin forgiven, otherwise he will not be heard. The example of Master Philipp, the chancellor of Paris,[[1]](#endnote-1) Joan. [9:31]: “God does not hear sinners.”

Concerning the second, that what is sought be convenient to the condition of the seeker. The example is concerning (Zeno) of Citium,[[2]](#endnote-2) who was seeking a denarius from King Antigonous. It was not given because he did not teach the king to give anything so small. And again, to the same seeker, a city is not given because he did not befit the king to give so small a thing. And again, to the same seeker, the city is not given because it does not befit to seek such a large city. But more congruently sought Solomon, 3 Kings 3[:11] seeking wisdom from God. Note here the history, for this reason Paul [Eph. 3:14-15] and the mother of the sons of Zebedee were not heard in their petition [Matt. 20:20-22], because they did not seek matter for themselves, nor pleasing to God. Because of this it is said in John 16[:23]: “If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.” Where Bede says,[[3]](#endnote-3) *Dominica quarta post octauam pasche*, they in the name of the Father seek what they seek for their own salvation. Wherefore Augustine says, *Super canonica Joannis*,[[4]](#endnote-4) he is not heard for his will, but for his salvation. In this fashion sometimes, he is heard for his will, but not for his salvation, as when it was permitted to tempt Job [1:12]. And to enter the herd of pigs, [Mark 5:12]. But much truer he is heard as if demons. The example in the physician who more truly heard the sick man asking him for harmful things, and he does not give them to him. Immediately he gives him what is allowed, he does not listen to the will, however he listed to his health. It is read among the poets[[5]](#endnote-5) and the Philosopher, in the first book of the *Politics*,[[6]](#endnote-6) that the King of the Liddians, Midas, sought from the gods that whatever he would touch would become gold, and so it was done. Wherefore also his food was turned in gold, this Midas died. And what should be given to the despairing. Whatever he asks. So, it seems that God gives to the damned just as to the devils that what they ask, as riches and honors, but to his elect also instantly to those seeking either to put off giving or not to give.

Third, God requires diligence in asking. The example is in the woman of Canaan who often repulsed yet took a stand, Matt. [9:20].

¶ However the reason why God puts off giving immediately. Augustine, *De verbis Domini*, sermon 5,[[7]](#endnote-7) saying when God gives more tardily, God appreciates and conserves, not negates. For things considered longer are sweeter to be obtained. Quickly given, they become vile. God conserves for himself, what he does not want to quickly give, that you learn to inquire and seek avidly.

¶ Of course it is always to pray and not to give up. However sometimes God does not give what is asked because it is asked badly. Wherefore Augustine, in explaining that of John 16[:23]:[[8]](#endnote-8) “if you ask the Father anything,” etc., says who asks for a thing, something from eternal life, does not ask what they are in comparison to it. For, many who ask, but in their evil intention, such as Adonias out of ambition of reigning asked Abisag to be given to him as a wife, 3 Reg. 2[:21]. And he was killed.

Again, in Psal. [105:15; 77:31] it is said, “He gave them their request,” and it follows, “And he slew the fat ones amongst them,” etc. Wherefore Chrysostom, *Homilia* 27,[[9]](#endnote-9) not that which we seek from God, what we judge to be good, but in praying we place ourselves in the will of God, that which he will concede to us, what he judges is necessary for us.

¶ Concerning the fourth, that one from whom it is asked is open and clement when it is God. Therefore, it is easy that he concedes what is justly asked, John 16[:24]: “Ask, and you shall receive.” For to ask a benefice from one in need, counsel from a fool, help from one infirm would be foolish. Therefore, securely man can ask three things: remission of fault, infusion of grace, and the commission of glory.

¶ Concerning the first, Tob. 3[:15]: “I beg, O Lord, that you loose me from the bond of this reproach.” Thus, one fallen into a pit, one besieging an indestructible castle seeks help. Judith 6[21]: “They prayed, desiring help of the God of Israel.” But because of the fault committed those things followed.

Third, the evil remainder, namely, note the impressions of infamy, the evil interruption of penance.

Therefore, against the first, Sara asks, Tob. 3[:15]: “I beg, O Lord, that thou loose me from the bond of this reproach.”

Against the second, Esth. 8[:5] asked, “I beseech you, O Lord, that the former letters of Aman may be reversed by new letters.” So, we see concerning milk poured from a vase holds the color of honey, the taste of wine, and the odor. So, after sin remains the sorrow of desertion in association, the taste of delight in the imagination, the odor of turpitude in the speaking.

¶ These letters are to be corrected by new epistles, that is, by laborious studies, worldly thoughts, and honest conversations.

Against the third, Job 6[:8-9] asked, “Who will grant that my request may come,” it follows, “he that has begun may destroy me.”

¶ What does it profit a fighter to contend bravely in the beginning and to fall in the end.

Second, a man ought to seek the infusion of grace, Zach. 10[1]: “Ask of the Lord rain,” that is, grace which in the manner of rain restrains and cools the ardor of concupiscence, makes fruitful in good work, and descends from above by the giving of God.

¶ Tercio, he ought to seek the conferment of glory, like the liberation of the incarcerated, Joan. 16[:23]: “If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.” But because the Apostle says to Rom. 8[:26]: “We know not what we should pray for; but the Spirit himself ask for us.” Therefore it is to be known that many ask as if nothing, namely, these earthly matters which quickly give out, Matt. 16[:26]: “For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?” as if saying, not what does it profit, but as if nothing, Wis. 5[:8]: “What has pride profited us?,” etc.

1. Philippe le Chancelier, also known as "Philippus Cancellarius Parisiensis" (Philip, Chancellor of Paris) (c 1160–December 26, 1236). As a result, by the time that Philip became chancellor, at least on paper, it appeared as if the power of his office had been greatly reduced, even with respect to granting the teaching license. For although the chancellor retained the power to grant these licenses, the statutes dictated that he could not turn down anyone the masters deemed fit to teach. But in reality, a long struggle ensued between the masters and the chancellor, who sought to retain his power, beginning with Philip's predecessor (Stephen of Reims) and continuing into much of Philip's own tenure. Finally, in the late 1220s and early 1230s, Philip made his peace with the masters, who had gone on strike and left Paris along with many of their students in response to a conflict with the secular authorities. No doubt recognizing that their departure imperiled the continuing prestige of Paris as a center of education, as well as his own position, Philip worked hard to convince the scholars to return to Paris and reconvene their classes. His efforts were successful, and the masters returned in 1231.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/philip-chancellor/>

Cf. Augustine, *Sermo* 136.2 (PL 38:751): Caeci error, putantis peccatores non exaudiri. Vidistis caecum istum oculis fidei, vidistis etiam ex caeco videntem: sed audistis errantem. In quo errabat caecus iste, dico: primum quia Christum prophetam putabat, Dei Filium nesciebat. Deinde audivimus unam responsionem ipsius prorsus falsam: ait enim, Scimus quia peccatores Deus non exaudit. Si peccatores Deus non exaudit, quam spem habemus? Si peccatores Deus non exaudit, utquid oramus, et testimonium peccati nostri tunsione pectoris dicimus? Ubi est certe ille Publicanus, qui cum Pharisaeo ascendit in templum, et illo Pharisaeo jactante, ventilante merita sua, ille stans longe, et oculis fixis in terra, et tundens pectus suum, confitebatur peccata sua? Et descendit iste, qui confitebatur peccata sua, justificatus de templo, magis quam ille Pharisaeus **(Luc. XVIII, 10-14)**. Certe peccatores Deus exaudit. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Zeno of Citium, Zeno of Citium (c. 334 – c. 262 BC) was a Hellenistic thinker from Citium (Κίτιον, Kition), Cyprus.

Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.1. Zeno

(LCL 185: 122-125): Antigonus of Carystus tells us that he never denied that he was a citizen of Citium. For when he was one of those who contributed to the restoration of the baths and his name was inscribed upon the pillar as “Zeno the philosopher,” he requested that the words “of Citium” should be added. He made a hollow lid for a flask and used to carry about money in it, in order that there might be provision at hand for the necessities of his master Crates. It is said that he had more than a thousand talents when he came to Greece, and that he lent this money on bottomry.

King Antigonus often broke in on him with a noisy party, and once took him along with other revellers to Aristocles the musician; Zeno, however, in a little while gave them the slip. He disliked, they say, to be brought too near to people, so that he would take the end seat of a couch, thus saving himself at any rate from one half of such inconvenience. Nor indeed would he walk about with more than two or three. He would occasionally ask the bystanders for coppers, in order that, for fear of being asked to give, people might desist from mobbing him, as Cleanthes says in his work On Bronze. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Bede, *Homilia* 7 (PL 94:165): Illo, inquiens, die in nomine meo petetis. In die etenim petunt, quia non in tenebris pressurarum, ut nostra in praesenti, sed in luce sempiternae pacis, et gloriae beatorum spirituum pro nobis intercessio funditur. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Augustine, *In Epistolam Joannis* 6.7 (PL 35:2023): Sed discernamus exauditiones Dei. Invenimus enim quosdam non exauditos ad voluntatem, exauditos ad salutem: et rursus quosdam invenimus exauditos ad voluntatem, et non exauditos ad salutem. Hoc discernite, hoc tenete exemplum ejus qui non est exauditus ad voluntatem, sed exauditus ad salutem. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.100-104 (LCL 43:126-127): Huic deus optandi gratum, sed inutile, fecit muneris arbitrium gaudens altore recepto. ille male usurus donis ait “effice, quicquid

corpore contigero, fulvum vertatur in aurum.” adnuit optatis nocituraque munera solvit

Then did the god, rejoicing in his foster-father’s safe return, grant to the king the free choice of a boon, a pleasing, but useless gift. Midas, fated to make an ill use of his gift, exclaimed: “Grant that whatsoever I may touch with my body may be turned to yellow gold.” Bacchus granted his prayer and gave him the baleful gift, [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Arisotle, Politics 1.9 1257b13-16 (Barnes 2:1995): he who is rich in coin may often be in want of necessary food. But how can that be wealth of which a man may have a great abundance and yet perish with hunger, like Midas in the fable, whose insatiable prayer turned everything that was set before him into gold? [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Augustine, *Sermons de scripturis* 61.5 (PL 38:411): Sed cum aliquando tardius dat, commendat dona, non negat. Diu desiderata, dulcius obtinentur: cito autem data, vilescunt. Pete, quaere, insta. Petendo et quaerendo crescis, ut capias. Servat tibi Deus, quod non vult cito dare; ut et tu discas magna magne desiderare. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Augustine, *In Epistolam Joannis* 12.2 (PL 35:1897): Usque modo non petistis quidquam in nomine meo, duobus modis intelligi potest: vel quia non in nomine meo petistis, quod nomen non sicut cognoscendum est cognovistis; vel non petistis quidquam, quoniam in comparatione rei quam petere debuistis, pro nihilo habendum est quod petistis. Ut igitur in ejus nomine non nihil, sed gaudium plenum petant (quoniam si aliquid aliud petunt, idem aliquid nihil est), [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* homilia 35 ex cap. 20 (PG 56:827): Intelligere ergo debemus et nos, ut non illud a Deo petamus, quod nos bonum esse judicamus, sed orantes in ejus potestate ponamus, ut nos illud petentes exaudiat, quod ipse nobis expedire cognoscit. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)