

PARISHES OF  
**ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH**  
**AND**  
**SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW**  
**WEEKLY REFLECTION**

**Sunday 17th May 2026 Ascension of the Lord**  
**If God cannot change his mind, what is the point of prayer?<sup>1</sup>**

What is going to happen to us in the future is already known and willed by God. This, for reasons not explored here, does not mean that we lack free will. But God exists outside time and change is something that takes place in time. God, being eternal, is changeless. All this means that we cannot change God's mind.

There are passages in the Bible which might suggest that God does change his mind: an example is where the Ninevites repented of their sins after Jonah's preaching and it is said (Jonah 3:10): *"God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do them, and he did not do it."* In reality, it cannot be the case that God changed His mind. He cannot literally have been surprised at the repentance of the Ninevites. Nevertheless, there are many such Old Testament passages which speak – figuratively we would have to say – about God changing His mind and relenting.

Further, Christ instructs his disciples to petition God when he says: *"Ask, and it will be given to you"* and *"If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven"*<sup>2</sup>. The Lord's prayer, itself, is replete with requests to God: "give us", "forgive us" and "deliver us".

Yet, if God truly cannot change his mind, what is the point of prayer? If someone (say Aunt Mabel) is very sick, we pray for her and she gets better, what has been the effect of prayer? We have ruled out that we have changed God's mind. Thus, what has happened is that Aunt Mabel was always going to recover – that was both known and willed by God from all eternity. Crucially, however, our prayer for her was also both known and willed by God in the same way. Moreover, it was always the will of God that our prayer for Aunt Mabel should be part of the reason she got better.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a synopsis of an article titled "The Point of Prayer" by Richard J Ounsworth OP in the Catholic Herald September 2025

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:7 and 18:19

Prayers do not have magical powers. Rather, our prayer makes us participants in Divine Providence. The article of which this is (so far) a synopsis draws a conclusion which I shall now quote verbatim.

It is not – or, at least, not usually – that God gives us the ability to interfere in the natural order of things, but rather that by His will and knowledge all natural causes take place. When we pray out of love, our natural concern for others – or indeed ourselves – is elevated to the level of the divine, the supernatural. In short, we should pray for things we want because to do so raises our human wills up to participate in God's loving care for the world and for all His children. We do not change his mind, but He changes ours, and if we pray honestly for the things we care about, we open ourselves to the possibility that He will shape our minds to care about the things that really matter.

Stephen S.