

# A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

## *The Cheapest, Greatest Gift in the World*

**W**hat do you give someone who has everything?

In the first moments of his papacy, when he stepped on to the balcony of St. Peter's, Pope Francis uttered words he would repeat again and again, signaling what matters to him—and, really, what matters to the world.

“I ask you to pray to the Lord that He bless me,” he said, “the prayer of the people for a blessing upon their bishop. Let us take a moment of silence for you to offer your prayer for me.”

A hush fell over the world. Countless prayers rose on his behalf. Time stood still.

At the end of that appearance, again he asked the world, in that plain and beautiful way of his: “Pray for me.”

A few days later, the Pope sent out his first Tweet and repeated: “I ask you to continue to pray for me.” Then, during his first Sunday Angelus, he said: “Thank you for your welcome,” and he concluded very simply, “Pray for me.”

How could we possibly refuse?

What the Holy Father was doing was hardly unusual or out of the ordinary; how often do any of us ask someone, “Pray for me”? It is part of our Christian vocabulary. We ask for prayers, we offer them in time of need, we remind people who are struggling or stressed, “It's okay. I'll keep you in my prayers.”

But here's the thing: I'm not sure any of us quite realize the potency and power of that simple gift. To pray for another is to do more than whisper a “Hail Mary” or an improvised petition. It's more than a candle lit or a rosary recited. It's greater than a thought or a memory or a favor.

It is nothing less than entrusting that person in some indescribable way to the care of God.

To remember another person in prayer is to wish and hope for someone else, fervently, for what we'd normally wish and hope for ourselves.

It might be something like peace. Or love. Support or success. Healing or strength. It might be “help me find a job” or “help her stay sober one more day.”

It's asking for help, and offering it. To pray for another, or the intention of another, is to say in a quiet and unobtrusive way, “Here. Let me help you carry that. Let me bring it with me to The One who will know what to do.”

A prayer offered for another is a gift without wrapping. And no wonder: No paper or box could even begin to contain it. Prayers come in all sizes and shapes. I've prayed for people (including, yes, myself) to find their keys and pass a final; I've prayed for my wife to make it through surgery. I've prayed for a disease to be cured and for a child to be born healthy and for a loved one, at the end of a difficult illness, to be graced with a peaceful and quiet death. I've prayed for rain. I've prayed for sun. I've prayed, during the Super Bowl, for the Redskins.

The great thing about prayer, of course, is that for better or worse, it always works. Really. It helps to remember this: No prayer goes unanswered. Oh, it may not be the answer we want. But it is certainly the answer we need. The great journey of life, I think, lies in coming to understand that, and be content with it, and to be grateful for what we are given.

And what we are given when someone prays for us—and what we, in turn, give when we pray for them—is immeasurable and invaluable. It might well be the grandest, smallest, lightest, heaviest, most extravagant and most invisible offering you can make—or that someone else can make for you. It's grace. And it's a gift. The cheapest, greatest gift in the world.

What can you give someone who has everything?

Pray. It's plenty.

And it's priceless.

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