

This is the first of two parables that Jesus tells in Luke 18 about prayer. (The second will be read at Mass next Sunday.) This first parable is a lesson in persistence in prayer. (Next Sunday's parable will address attitude in prayer.) While the parable seems to present prayer as nagging God for what we want, such a reading misses the point. God is not like the judge in the parable, worn down by requests and coerced to respond. The key is found in the description of the judge as corrupt and unjust. Since God can be neither, we must understand Jesus to be saying that if even an unjust judge responds to the persistence of the widow, how much more so will God listen to our prayers. God truly wants to hear our needs and respond generously. It is the final lament of Jesus that gets to the point of the parable. The lesson is about the persistence of the one who prays. God wants us to be like the persistent widow, staying in relationship with God, confident that God hears and answers prayers. Then Jesus laments, "Will such faith be found when the Son of Man comes?" In this lament, Jesus notes how easy it can be for us to lose heart. - See more at: <http://www.loyolapress.com/29th-sunday-in-ordinary-time-c-sunday-connection.htm#sthash.dmhN2p9y.dpuf>

29th Sun [C] 2013

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Exodus 17:8-13; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2; Luke 18:1-8

When people are enduring great difficulties along with emotional and spiritual crises of various sorts you may have heard them say: "I've tried everything. Now the only thing left to do is to pray." It's as if praying is something to be done only as a last resort in times of trouble. Then, when all else has failed and we sense impending failure we, in desperation, turn to God and ask Him for a miracle.

At first we try to solve problems on our own using our own judgments and powers. Some of our methods don't make much sense at all. Some of our methods are harsh and mean-spirited. Some inflict pain on others while other methods only bring more pain down upon us. Smashing things on the floor doesn't work. Giving the cold shoulder and the silent treatment doesn't solve family disputes. Calling others names and refusing to negotiate is on display in the present crises in Washington. It's childish. How many times have you heard folks mentioning that our present crop of politicians are acting like children?

God's ways are found in the bible. In today's first reading we learn that Israelites, realizing that Moses was God's anointed spokesman, had begun their arduous flight from Egypt where they had been held in slavery and were now on their way to the Promised Land. All was well until they encountered trials and difficulties. Then they began to ignore God, ignore Moses, and rely on their own desires expressed in false gods to solve their problems. Not only that but they also began to refashion God into their own likeness figuring that they would only be comfortable with a God who made them feel comfortable.

Moses tried to teach them that reality was otherwise and that they had to obey God consistently and follow Him faithfully instead of using God only in times of emergencies. Human ways don't work, only God's ways lead to eventual happiness, freedom, and peace.

Being persistent, constant, and untiring in prayer is important. God is untiring in trying to reach us, untiring in trying to come into our hearts. Time and again Jesus tells us that we should pray, pray a lot, pray often,

and be untiring in turning to God. That is the important point we heard about in today's first reading taken from the Book of Exodus. There we find the Israelites were in a fight against one of their enemies. Moses was on top of a hill overlooking the battle and the author of the Book of Exodus tells us:

As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. Moses' hands, however, grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

In today's Gospel account we hear Jesus giving us the parable of the woman who continually calls on the judge to hear and answer her petition?

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. He said, "There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, 'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.' For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, 'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.'" The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night?"

At the time of Jesus if anyone had dared to compare God with an unjust judge who was ultimately swayed only by the nuisance of a shrieking female plaintiff such a comparison would have been condemned as irresponsible and even blasphemous. But what is Jesus telling us? Again, that consistency, perseverance, steadfastness, along with continuing courage, are needed in our lives and that these strengths, these virtues can be found only in a life lived out in persistent prayer. Prayer should be our normal way of life, not just a last resort in times of difficulty. We can only live life well and effectively in a sustained connection with God. Prayer is not an isolated act – it is a way of life.

Nor does it come cheap for us. There's a price to pay for coming to Mass each and every weekend. It's not something by which we can "go it alone" with God. We need our mutual support. We need our family of faith. We need each other's prayers. We need each other's strength. That should be a constant in our lives.

So, too, we find that truth in the writers of the New Testament. For example St. Paul in writing to the Thessalonians admonishes us: *Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

We live now in a world that offers us quick answers to our problems along with quick responses to our needs. Think of all of the "time saving" devices that surround us. With our smart phones we can communicate with others anywhere in the world with the touch of a few buttons. Television ads and Internet ads offer us instant loans of money. Any number of products can be purchased with a few strokes on our computer keyboards. Moreover we can instantly pay for them via credit cards using a few more key strokes on our computers. Even the Post Office allows us to pay for postage on its Internet web page. All of our needs and wants can be fulfilled these days in no time at all. It's no wonder that our days are crammed, jammed with things to do.

Amidst all of this, prayer, meditation, and time with God are in an uphill battle. The world has shaped us into being an impatient people. But are we altogether different from the people of St. Paul's time? I don't think so. In today's second reading we find St. Paul writing to one of his most devoted followers: Timothy. Said he:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. (2 Timothy 3)

So when the Son of Man comes back again, will he find anyone praying, praying consistently, and faithfully? Will He find faith on earth?

REFLECTION

The beginning of the chapter from which our First Reading is taken opens with the grumbling of the followers of Moses, because they were thirsty and God provided for them eventually. They had put God to the test by complaining to Moses who in turn prayed for flowing help.

The second half of this chapter is a win-lose proposition. The Amorites, ancient enemies of Israel, under the leadership of Amalek, came to wage war against God's people. We hear Moses giving Joshua a battle plan, or at least an instruction to "Go get em!" Moses planned to sit up in the hillside bleachers and watch. Watching wasn't enough, so Moses stretched out his arms and somehow that worked to the advantage of the Israelites. His arms in prayer grew weary and when they dropped so did the fortunes of the Israelites. So Aaron and Hur held up the praying arms and the victory in arms was rendered to the Jews.

The Gospel readings for the next two weekends will be centered about the theme of praying. They follow closely the final verses of the previous chapter in Luke's account. The "kingdom of God" or "the day of the coming" are of considerable interest to the Pharisees and too, the disciples of Jesus. They do not get a direct calendar-date answer, but are invited to watch and trust. It is into this context that the subject of prayer is inserted.

Often in the Hebrew Scriptures special care is urged for the traveler, the children, and the widow. Cf. Deut. 27, 19

The first verse sets the tone. The story is addressed to the disciples lest they grow tired of the above-mentioned watching and praying. The judge of the story is a person known in the community as a person who is to care especially for the "widows". The widow is seeking the just execution of her rights. The judge pays little attention to her banging at his door until he figures out that she might break down the door and literally "give him a black eye". So, rather than the door giving in to her pounding, he gives in.

The last verse is the important one for the disciples and for us to hear. "But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" This is not a story about praying until we get what we want. It is an encouragement to pray so that we might wait and watch for all of God's comings and goings. It is about the aspect of faith which goes beyond believing in God as a dogmatic truism. It is about believing that the loving God cannot be manipulated like a loving father can be by the winking of his precious little daughter.

We do ask the very good question about why should we pray at all. Is there a mystical number of askings and we tire God out and bingo, here it is! Is there a certain set of words which trips

the benevolent bucket? People ask me, a priest, to pray for them as if God has a special ear for priestly prayers. I do say I will pray for them, and that is exactly what I do. I pray that they take their situation to a prayer of watching and waiting for God's presence rather than presents. What Jesus is asking of the disciples is a faith that combines with hope.

We are generally pragmatists. We put in time, effort, words, works, thought, creativity and expect, yes, demand results *pdq!* This is not faith, it is business. Apparently God is presently out of that kind of business and into personal and communal relating.

Why are we called to pray? We pray so that we can experience our central human truths. We are not god. We are limited. We desire union, peace, and joy. We love being human until we experience needs, losses, injuries, and fears. We are invited to kneel right down in the midst of it all and have faith, which is not always pragmatically available and not to our liking. We pray to announce our dependencies and our truth that faith, hope, watching and waiting are those things which Jesus is asking for of the disciples.

We would rather have Jesus open up for business and we would gladly be His business agents, consultants and product managers and sometimes, that is how we do pray. We can pray with such sincere hearts and devotion, with great needs and so deep a faith that God just has to see things our ways. "What other way is there!" We pray to be available to the answer to that one.

"See how the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His love, that he may rescue them from death and feed them in time of famine." Ps. 33, 18-19

Year C

Reading 1

Ex
od
17
:8-
13

As long as Moses kept his arms raised, Israel had the advantage.

Psalm

Ps
120
r.2

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Reading 2

2
Ti
m
3:1
4-
4:2

The man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work.

Gospel Acclamation

cf.
Eph
1:1
7.1
8

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our mind, so that we can see what hope his call holds for us.

Gospel

H *The word of God is something alive*
eb *and active; it can judge secret*
4:1 *emotions and thoughts.*
2

Lu *God will see justice done to his*
ke *chosen who cry to him.*
18:
1-8