

## SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [C]

Genesis 18: 20 - 32

Colossians 2: 12 - 14

Luke 11: 1 - 13

The other week I conducted a funeral where the family wanted the song, The Living Years by Mike And The Mechanics played.

(Mike is Mike Rutherford of the band, Genesis.)

It's all about a Son failing to tell his Dad how he truly felt about him before his Dad died. And this particular family wanted it because they felt they hadn't ever really told their Dad how much they loved him; and, also, because he wouldn't be around to see the birth of his first Grandchild.

When this part of the lyrics was sung: "I wasn't there that morning when my Father passed away. I didn't get to tell him all the things I had to say. I think I caught his spirit later that same year. I'm sure I heard his echo in my baby's new born tears. I just wish I could have told him in the living years." B.A. Robertson & Mike Rutherford: The Living Years they all silently wept.

How we got on as children with our own Father can have consequences that reverberate for the rest of our lives.

And, on a much deeper level, how we view our earthly Father can colour our relationship with our Father in heaven.

If our relationship with our earthly Father was strained, and we saw him as a distant, authoritarian figure; then that's how we're likely to see our heavenly Father.

Psychologists tell us that if we've had a bad experience of our earthly Father, we're likely to be scarred for life.

But we're Christians: we know that the Lord can bring wholeness and healing to the most broken of lives. Or do we?

Perhaps we only pay lip service to the concept of Jesus actually being able to heal us physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

Perhaps we view the miracle stories in the New Testament as mythical events; not that they actually happened or, indeed, have any relevance for us today.

The Church is in the business of Sacraments: we're a Sacramental Church; and Sacraments actually make really present the presence, and the power of Jesus.

They're neither magic tricks, myths, nor hollow charades.

They're more real than the profoundest reality we can imagine.

And the purpose of the Sacraments is to bring to our fallen, hurting world the real presence of Christ for healing and wholeness.

The Jesus of the New Testament who healed the sick, and made broken people whole again, is the same Jesus we meet in the Sacraments.

Now all Catholics know - don't we - there are seven Sacraments; but do you know there's another Sacrament - the Church?

When the Bishops of the Catholic Church gathered to renew the face of the Church at the Second Vatican Council, they said that: "It was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church."

Second Vatican Council: Sacrosanctum Concilium 5

So the Church, because she makes present the healing and redeeming power and presence of Jesus, is a Sacrament.

Sometimes it's hard to grasp that truth because our expectations of the Church don't always live up to how it actually acts, and behaves.

But, as with all Sacraments, we have to get behind the fallen human face of those who celebrate them to see the inner reality - Jesus the Lord.

After all, if the Bishop, Priest or Deacon are having an off day, and don't put their hearts 100% in to the celebration of the Eucharist, it doesn't diminish the fact that the Crucified, Risen, and Glorified Jesus is really present.

We are just human after all, and do have off-days!

So, if the Church is a Sacrament, we as members of Christ's Body take that Sacrament with us into all the nitty-gritty situations of our lives.

We're, as it were, little 'sacraments' of Jesus to anyone we come into contact with by the way we talk, act, and treat other people.

And how we think of God the Father will have a profound influence on how we live out our Christian lives.

People were drawn to Jesus because the way in which He loved His Father and His Father loved Him, shone through His humanity.

So, first of all, we have to have a loving relationship with our Father in heaven; and from that will flow those gifts of the Spirit that will cause people to ask what it is that makes us different - makes us alive.

They'll be able to see, as Paul says in Colossians, that: "God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins." Col. 2: 13

So let's look at today's Gospel to begin to understand how we can have a loving relationship with our Father.

What strikes me immediately is that the Father's pictured as a friend.

We're used to thinking of God as Father. But thinking of Him as our friend? Maybe that's an unusual concept to you.

Nevertheless, it's there in black and white in the Gospel; for the friend from whom the other person wants to borrow three loaves of bread is a picture of God the Father.

God is a friend surrounded by us, His friends.

That's the scenario painted by Jesus in this teaching of His, which is primarily about prayer.

And Jesus paints a picture of persistence in prayer.

It's not just a matter of going through the motions of saying a few set prayers in the shortest time possible.

What we're really doing in prayer is becoming one with Jesus through His Spirit, and coming into the real presence of our Father to engage in a listening conversation with Him.

Also, when we enter into prayer it's not just a matter of bending God's ear, and giving Him a shopping list of what we'd like from Him.

It's listening to what the Father's saying to us, and acting upon it.

And, when we start to pray for the things that really matter, we're entering into battle.

With Jesus we're entering into a spiritual battle with the powers of darkness; the power of Satan. That evil power whose sole aim is to convince the world that God doesn't care; doesn't even exist.

Our prayer is the weapon that will, in reality, stop Satan in his tracks.

It's very easy to think that God doesn't care when pain and suffering is before our eyes every day on the news, and in our own lives.

But let's not forget for one moment that behind it all is the Evil One.

And we're contending against him, just as Jesus did on the Cross, when we start to pray in the Lord's name for the alleviation of pain, suffering, injustice, and death.

But even the smallest, and seemingly insignificant prayer of ours will make a difference.

That's the point of this story Jesus tells about that sleepy man from whom the friend tries to extract some food.

It takes, as Jesus says: "Shameless persistence." Lk. 11: 8

"So [Jesus says]: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened." Lk. 11: 9 - 10

That's His promise to us if in a few moments we don't just say, but pray, with shameless persistence: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." See Lk. 11: 2