

## **Twenty Ninth Sunday of the Year October 16, 2016,**

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

The theme that pervades through the readings of today is Prayer and more specifically, the prayer of Petition. Prayer is understood as the raising of our heart and soul to God, the all gracious and loving Father. We place before him our needs and our aspirations and trust that the Lord will grant our requests. The prayer of Petition is typically a Christian prayer. In this prayer we place ourselves humbly before our Lord and submit ourselves to him totally. This is the prayer of Jesus and it is the prayer he taught his disciples. Today's Readings tell us about prayer and the need to persevere in our prayers. Prayer is our means of communication with God and it is the means to experience our closeness to him. At the same time Prayer is personal which comes from our heart and is a means to express our feelings and emotions and placed them before God. It is also a way to show faith in the God to which we believe in. In the Gospel of today Luke tells us that it important to pray always without becoming weary of prayer. Here we have the story of the unjust judge and a forlorn widow. The judge is typically a powerful and influential person, whereas the widow is fragile, vulnerable and helpless. Her persistence and constant pleading helps her to receive the right judgment. In the first reading we have the example of the power of prayer that led the Israelites to their victory in war. The second reading tells us of the usefulness of the inspired word of God and the perseverance in faith.

The First Reading taken from the Book of Exodus, tells us of the importance of prayer. Here we have the prayer of Moses during the time of battle and Israel searching for victory. The Israelites had almost reached the Promised Land. Now they confront an enemy, the Amalek and the Israelites go and fight at Rephidim. Moses sent Joshua to fight with the Amalek while he, accompanied by Aaron and Hur, stood on the top of the hill with the staff of God in his hand. As long as Moses kept his hands up, Israel was victorious. When he lowered his hands, Amalek was victorious. After a while, Moses was tired of keeping his hands up in the air. So Aaron and Hur put a stone under Moses so he could sit on it. Then they went on each of his sides, each one holding one of Moses' hands up until the sun set. Finally, Joshua defeated Amalek and his people as Moses prayed holding his hands high. Although it could be seen that way that the prayer posture got the victory, this is not really manipulation or superstition. Rather it is an expression of total dependence on God: without him there would be no victory. This indicates that the victory of the Jews was

not due to the human power and strength but because of the power of Prayer and the perseverance of Moses in it. Moses becomes the mediator between God and man and brings victory to his people.

In the Second Reading Paul speaks to Timothy about the necessity of perseverance in faith. Paul urges Timothy to continue in what he had learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom he had learned it and how from his childhood he had known the sacred writings that are able to instruct for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Even though Timothy had learnt from his Jewish tradition particularly his parents much about the faith, it was from Paul that Timothy had learned about Jesus Christ. Now Paul solemnly charges Timothy to announce the word of God in all circumstances and to proclaim the message of Jesus, by challenging and encouraging people. He asks Timothy to be persistent in this work whether the time is favourable or unfavourable, with the utmost patience in teaching. Paul tells his disciple that the Scriptures provide wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. When we are not aware when the Lord will return with His Kingdom, our assurance of fidelity to him is our perseverance. Paul urged Timothy to be zealous, to take advantage of every opportunity to preach, for it is through us that the grace of God is manifested by His Spirit in this world. He asks his disciple to persevere in his living faith, to be welcomed into His eternal Kingdom.

In today's Gospel we have a parable in the Gospel about a judge and a poor widow who is seeking justice. The point of the parable is to teach an important lesson about the necessity of perseverance in prayer. Luke in the Gospel tells us not to be discouraged if we do not receive immediate response to the prayer we make. In Palestine every town or large village had a man appointed by the central authority in Jerusalem whose duty it was to settle all local disputes brought to him. This particular judge is called an unjust person, a totally corrupt individual, who cared for no one, neither God nor man. The widow, on the other hand, a helpless person, representing the anawim, the poor of Yahweh and was looking for justice regarding her own property. She has only God as her protector and care taker. Certainly she hoped for a good response only because of her awareness that she was right and her persistence would win justice for her. She went repeatedly to him pleading for justice. The judge decides in her favour not because he cared for her or anyone special but mainly due to her perseverance and persisting in her pleading. He in fact wanted to get rid of her.

Now Jesus says that if a corrupt, egoistic judge can be eventually moved by the perseverance of a helpless widow, how much more so the all just all merciful God will be moved to help his chosen friends who approach him in sincerity and filial love. Jesus goes further to explain himself about such a benevolent God who is like a good Father. He uses the example of the love of a parent towards his child. He asks them whether any parent among them would give a child a stone when he asked for bread. Or will he give a scorpion when he asks for an egg. Would he give a snake when child asks for a fish? Naturally their answer would be no, they would not do anything bad for their child. If even worldly parents will give their children what they need and not give anything dangerous says Jesus, how much more the loving God in heaven will see to the needs of his children.

The two characters in the parable, an unjust judge and a widow, set up an immediate contrast. While a just judge was not considered to be divine, a judge was expected to be just and caring and manifest the same values and practices associated with the Lord. We learn immediately in this parable that the judge here is unfit for his office since he does not fear God nor respect any human being. The widow is portrayed as being in a plight of having to fight in court for what was justly hers but was denied her because of her vulnerability. We are led to expect that the unjust judge will support the widow's oppressors and rule against her. Contrary to what we expect the unjust judge gives in and renders a just decision in favour of the widow. However, it is important to realize that the judge's actions have nothing to do with any desire to act justly, fairly or in caring manner towards the widow. The persistence of the woman who was unwilling to give up until she received justice won out. Jesus does not praise the judge or hold him up for imitation in any way. The lesson he gives us is the widow's perseverance. If she could the favour from an unjust judge for her persistent prayer, how much more will be the gifts we receive from the all loving God?

Thus in this parable of today Jesus teaches us to persevere in our prayer and not to lose heart if the request is not granted immediately. In his teachings, Paul repeated these instructions of Jesus. He preached to the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing, to pray always and to be at the service of the Lord and to be ardent in spirit. As we heard in the Gospel because the poor widow kept returning to the unjust judge, bothering him to the point that he could no longer tolerate her presence and granted justice to her against her opponent. Had she given up, she would have continued to suffer injustice all her life. If this widow had lot of wealth and convenience, there may not have been the

need to beg. She could have been like any other person perhaps bribing and getting favours from the judge. Jesus points out to a situation where a helpless person could get so much through perseverance, how much more God would do, the one who does not need any bribe and has the favourable disposition towards all. Therefore, to obtain our salvation, we must persevere in our living faith, in our adoration of God, in our love towards others, in our righteousness, in our obedience to God, in our servitude, in our humility, all of these being the food that feeds our souls to assure our salvation through Jesus Christ.

What Jesus teaches his disciples is that our perseverance in prayer of petition develops our trust and confidence in God. It helps us to become humble and to realize how weak we are when left to ourselves. It keeps us close to God, as we learn how dependent we are on his generosity. If we only would realize that God is perhaps never closer to us than when we think he is forgetting us or that he has abandoned us. The trials of life whether they are temporal or spiritual, are not obstacles to our spiritual progress but rather are the stepping stones without which we cannot cross the rivers of life. We have the command from Jesus to ask for anything and we shall receive. Again, he tells us to seek and we shall find what we are searching for. However, this does not necessarily mean that what we have been looking for is readily available. Similarly when we knock the door may open but not the door we wanted or we may find something different and difficult. All these do not mean God has abandoned us but he at that moment is close to us.

The Gospel tells us that if only we persevere in our asking God for anything, he will respond to us. He gives us the message to pray always without growing weary. Secondly, we must have faith that God is with us, even when we do not immediately see the results of our prayers. Thirdly he wants us always to be concerned with justice for the rich and the poor for God cares for us equally. Surely it means asking for those things which will bring us closer to God, those things that help us to know, love and serve him better. At the same time to learn those things that help us to be a better channel of his Love for others. It means above all asking to know what his will is for us and the strength to carry it out. When we read this parable about perseverance, we usually think of it in these terms: God is the judge and we are like the widow. This means we should persevere in pestering God until we are given what we want. We, like the judge, are basically unjust. Sometimes we, too, have no fear of God; that is, we do not allow God to scare us into being good. Similarly, like the judge we persist in refusing to listen to the cries of the poor all around us. But God is the

persistent widow who will not go away. He will persist until we render a just judgment, that is, until we let the goodness out, until we learn to love.

The prayer of asking is at the heart of this passage. When Thomas Aquinas takes up the question of prayer, it is a study of the prayer of asking because, in a sense, it contains all our dependence on God and our faith. It is our sense of being loved that empowers us to turn to God and ask for ourselves and the need of others. Catherine of Siena records these words of the Father to her: "It is I who gave you the hunger and the voice with which you call me. Never lower your voice in crying out to me to be merciful to the world. I give to those who ask, and I invite you to ask. And I am very displeased with those who do not knock." Thus the framing material of the parable explains that it demonstrates the need to always pray and never give up, for if even an unjust judge will eventually listen, God is much quicker to do so. Some people who have read this parable get stuck on a supposed comparison between the evil judge and God. Jesus does not say that God is like the unjust judge. The point is, if an evil judge will eventually give relief to those who appeal to him, how much more God will give relief to His own chosen people. Jesus also says that God's people should always pray and not give up or lose heart because we are appealing to a perfectly just and righteous Judge. One way faith expresses itself is in the persistent, fervent practice of prayer. Prayer should not be understood that we need it only in emergencies like the fire extinguisher. The teaching of Christ is exceedingly plain. He tells us that we ought to pray regularly, always, knowing that God is perfectly just and will answer according to His wisdom.

A doctor was sharing his unique experience. A patient came to his office seeking a hip replacement. His former cardiologist believed that the man's heart was too weak for him to survive a major operation. However, a new cardiologist had stated that while the man faced risks in undergoing surgery, his condition appeared stable. Therefore, he gave his permission to proceed. The patient soon passed all preliminary tests. Still, on surgery day all could sense tension in the room among the nurses, anaesthesiologist, and the operating doctor. The patient could likely sense this as well. He said, "Doctor, I know this is a busy time, but I would like to ask you for one moment to pray." In his 20 years of medical practice, the doctor felt that no patient had ever made such a request. All chatter ceased. With his heart monitor beeping in the background, the patient prayed for God to take care of him and all of us in the room who were trying to help him. He thanked God for the opportunity to get better, acknowledging the human limitations of the staff in

trying to repair his fragile body. A sense of calm filled the room. The surgery was a success. In all his professional experience the doctor recalls that he had never felt more strongly than on that day the presence of God sent through the patient to him.

This Sunday on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October we are celebrating the 85th Mission Sunday. Annually, World Mission Sunday is celebrated on the last but one Sunday in October. This Sunday is set aside to think about our Mission to the world and is a reminder to us as to who we are and what we have to do. The mission comes directly from Jesus to his disciples to go out to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to all creation. He told them to go everywhere to preach the word of God, to heal and baptize people in his name. This Sunday is an important day in the life of the Church because it teaches how to sacrifice and to give their share as an offering made to God, for the service of the missions of the world. The theme of this year's celebration is, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Pope Benedict opened his remarks by emphasizing that the "announcement of the Gospel is destined for everyone." He added that the Church exists to evangelize. Her activity, in conformity with the word of Christ and under the influence of His grace and charity, becomes fully and truly present in all individuals and all peoples in order to lead them to faith in Christ. The task of spreading the Gospel, then, has lost none of its urgency today. But the Church cannot "rest easy" at the thought that "there are people who still do not know Christ, who have not yet heard His message of salvation."

World Mission Sunday is annually organized by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In one of his messages for the World Mission Sunday, Pope John Paul II had explained that the offerings that will be collected on this Sunday are destined for a common fund of solidarity, distributed in the Pope's name, by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith among the missions and missionaries of the entire world. It is the most precious service that the Church can render to humanity and to all individuals who are seeking the profound reasons to live their life to the full. This same invitation therefore resonates every year during the celebration of World Mission Day. Continuous proclamation of the Gospel, in fact, also invigorates the Church, her fervor and her apostolic spirit. It renews her pastoral methods so that they may be ever better suited to the new situations — even those which require a new evangelization — and enlivened by missionary zeal. In the words of Blessed John Paul II, "missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is

strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support” In a message the Pope had said that the offerings collected on World Mission Sunday are destined for a common fund of solidarity distributed, in the Pope's name, by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith among the missions and missionaries of the entire world. Every year the needs of the Catholic Church in the Missions grow - as new dioceses are formed, as new seminaries are opened because of the growing number of young men hearing Christ's call to follow Him as priests.

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