

## 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C) October 17, 2010

(Ex 17:8-13; 2Tim 3:14-4:2; Lk. 18:1-8)

This morning we come together to celebrate the 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. And Jesus tells us that although the ideal prayer for us Christians is praise and thanksgiving, there is also a place for prayers of petition, as today's Gospel parable makes quite clear.

Jesus is teaching us today about prayer in this famous story. The judge taking bribes is browbeaten by the widow into giving justice without benefit of his usual kickbacks. So, Jesus is asking, will not the generous Father, who has no need of bribes, give us all the tender loving care we need?

We are an "instant" people! We eat fast food, we carry cell phones and more of us ride on airplanes than cars or trains, all so that we don't have to wait for what we want. And we carry this need for instant answers into our faith life. We expect God to be an "instant god" and give us the answers to our prayers fast. But, like everything in life, prayer has certain ground-rules.

**First**, we need faith!

It is not our prayers that God hears but our confidence. Remember the old saying: faith is not just praying for rain, but going out and buying an umbrella!

**Second**, we have to give God a helping hand!

When we are praying to move that mountain, we have got to remember also to bring a shovel. There are two kinds of faith: one, we say we are willing to use the shovel to help get the job done; the other says we expect God to do all the heavy lifting. The ideal is to pray as though everything depends on God and work as though everything depends on us. We can pray that we do well in a test in school, but if we do not study, we will not pass.

**Third**, we cannot expect to get everything we pray for!

Nothing in life works that way. And, if we can turn down another person's request of us, why can't God do the same to us? God always answers our prayers, but sometimes the answer is no.

As I think back over my life I can remember many times that I thought that my prayers were not answered, only to find that what I wanted would not have been a happy fit in my life. I remember a quote from Oscar Wilde who said, "The worst thing in the world is to get nothing you want, but the next worst thing is to get everything you want." And

the words of St. Therese; “More tears are shed over answered prayers than over unanswered ones.”

**Fourth**, prayer has to be on the level!

It is not recommended to attempt to pull God’s leg! After all, it’s his territory we’re working, not ours. So, when we pray, do not use qualifying clauses. Leave the “ifs, ands and buts” at home. Can you imagine the out and out laughter in heaven every time the lottery gets big and all those “promissory” prayers go up to God? I promise to give half to the poor. So remember what Huck Finn said, “You cannot pray a lie.”

Whether it was the persistent widow with the unjust judge, Jesus in the agony of the garden or you and I caught up in problems which seem too big to ever get solved, faith is what keeps us going. God does not ask us to be perfect, because we will never be perfect. God asks us to keep trying. The ancient Israelites often failed to follow God perfectly, but when they raised their eyes in faith, they realized that the Lord was with them.

The persistent widow is the hero of today’s parable, not because she got what was rightfully hers, or even because she got the best of the unjust judge, but because she did not give up in the face of all the obstacles she faced and her apparent lack of success.

To see how God is at work wherever we are, both in the moments when we suffer and in the moments when we are on top of the world, requires us to open our eyes of faith, not just once but over and over again. Faith comes to us as a gift, the same way that the muscles of our bodies do. We cannot just “choose” to have lots of faith any more than we can “choose” to have big muscles. But every time we exercise our muscles at the gym, or our faith in prayer, faith and muscles do grow stronger. Persistence pays off in exercise and in prayer.

**The best way to learn to pray is by doing it!**

Take time, be silent for a while, ask for what you really want and then persevere in your prayer. Then finally let your prayer be an expression of your faith in God, so that like the widow, you believe that the Lord will answer.

Let me close with an old saying; “If the message comforts those who are afflicted and afflicts those who are comfortable, it is probably from God.