

ECHOING GOD’S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 16, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

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

Hands held up in prayer assure victory.
Remain faithful to what you have learned.
God will answer those who call out in prayer.

Luke:

Luke wants the Church to see itself as a poor widow. At least, this Bride no longer has a visible husband in this world. The Lord, Bridegroom of the Church, has been raised to the glory of heaven. The Church knows that he will return, but we still experience the delay as absence, as widowhood.

Widows in the ancient world truly lived in a desperate situation. The Hebrew word for widow is *almanah*, derived from a root word which means “unable to speak.” Widowhood or *almenuth* means “silence.” Women were treated as property, first of their father, then, passed on as property to their husbands. If the husband died young, while the sons were still unable to care for their mother, the widow was literally “without a voice.” She had no support, could not even administer her own goods, even if she did have some, and had to depend on the goodwill of the community and its leaders, men, of course, who often were inclined to abuse and exploit these defenseless women. To say that a widow is *poor* seems redundant to say the least. Of course, she was poor!

Not only is this widow poor, but she is also quite literally dependent upon the good will of the judge, who just happens to be corrupt! Everything is stacked against her. She does not stand a chance.

Remember, Luke wants the Church to see itself as this poor widow here. To whom shall we turn?

Well, the whole point of this parable is that if the widow can get a favorable hearing from an evil judge, how much more will the Church win a hearing from the Lord of Heaven and Earth who is in no way evil or corrupt? Persistence in prayer obtained a favorable response for her. Persistence in our prayer will most assuredly win us a favorable response from God.

When the Lord returns, will he find faith on the earth? The question is addressed by Jesus to the Church today: “Do you have any faith at all in the benevolence of God? Do you truly believe that God wants you to have the good things you are requesting? Or are you one of those who believe that good things have to be wrested out of God’s hands against his will? Don’t you have any faith in whom God truly is? That God already wants you to have the very best, the very things you are asking for?”

Persistence and perseverance in prayer are required, not to move God to give us what we need but to move us, to move our hearts, beyond the place of merely filling *wants* and coming to a deeper awareness of our *needs* before God. God does not need time to change; we need time, lots of time, before we are ready to benefit from the very gifts we are requesting. ‘Easy grace’ is no gift at all. Just filling the hands of our children with everything they ask does not do them any favor at all. There are gifts that require maturity before they can be enjoyed.

Exodus:

The people of Israel needed Moses and the prayer of Moses in order to sustain their courage in the battle against their opponents. Moses needed Aaron and Hur to sustain him in his prayer. All of them needed God to whom prayer was addressed. We may not be edified by the slaying of the Amalekites (“and Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people by the edge of the sword”), but we, too, do battle against the evils of our time. For this battle, we need one another; we need the intercession of the Lord Jesus who is the new Moses. We stand as a community before the forces of darkness that would envelop us if it were not for the power of Jesus Christ.

Timothy:

“*Praedica Verbum.*” “Preach the Word.” The episcopal motto of our former bishop, Daniel J. Feeney, was taken from this passage in Timothy. Bishop Feeney took seriously the admonition addressed to all bishops in the Church as they had been to Timothy. The primary responsibility of a bishop is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. It is the first duty of the Church, so it has to be that of a bishop. And ours, too.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Share with your group some instances when your persistence at prayer paid off for you in some marvelous but unexpected way. What would have happened to you if you had been given right away what you were initially asking for? How were you changed for the better in having to wait for a response? How was the gift given better than the one requested?
2. Does your parish really have the faith that Jesus will be looking for when he returns? In what way can it be said that the faith of the Church is perfect because it is given by God, yet imperfect because it is received by imperfect people? What can we do to prepare ourselves for a more perfect gift of faith? How is the continuing celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through the ages, a form of persistence in prayer? Why do we need to celebrate the Eucharist more than once in a lifetime?
3. Have you found it difficult to pray through the day even as you go about your ordinary duties? Can you make an act of consecration at the beginning of the day that will make the whole day a prayer? What do you need to do to have periodic reminders during the day? The *Practice of the Presence of God* is an ongoing form of prayer. The *Jesus Prayer* can be practiced frequently during the day. Have you ever tried these forms of prayer?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Set up certain times during the day when you will pause and remember that God is always present. Acknowledge that presence with a few words of praise and thanksgiving. That is the *Practice of the Presence of God*. The *Jesus Prayer* consists in saying “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God,*” as you **inhale** the breath, and “*have mercy on me, a sinner,*” as you **exhale** the breath, again and again.

PRAYER

*“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.”*

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Prayer in the Church is uttered by us who are the body of Christ so that our prayer becomes the prayer of Christ offered to the Father. Too often, we forget that Christ, God and human, is the one mediator who has direct access to God the Father. We sometimes act as if our prayers were worth something before God apart from Christ.

The one who utters the acceptable prayer before the throne of God is Christ Jesus, the Risen and Glorified Lord, who has taken our human nature with him into the heavenly realm, where he gathers the prayers of all who call upon his name and presents them to the Father, in his own name, on our behalf. There is good reason why we always conclude our prayers with “We ask this through Christ our Lord....”

Who are we, of ourselves, to stand before God even in praise and thanksgiving? What standing do we have before God, apart from Christ Jesus who has joined us to his very self in the adoption of faith and baptism? We do not even have a voice before God if it were not for the voice of Christ that has been given to us as we were initiated into the body of Christ.

We need to take these truths seriously and not presume to have access to the heavenly Father except through Christ our Lord. But, the fact is that we do have the voice of Christ. We have been taken into the body of Christ. We speak to God in Christ the Risen Lord. His prayer is uttered through our voices and through our words.

The Church as Bride of Christ stands with him before the throne of God to sing the praises of the Most High God, to make intercession for the needs of all the world. The prayer of the community is the most powerful prayer because it is the prayer of the whole Christ, head and body.

The sacred liturgy is the Church’s prayer in union with its head, the living Christ. Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, are prayers uttered by the community gathered in Christ, with the priest who makes Christ visible. The Liturgy of the Hours is a prayer spoken and sung by the Church as body of Christ on earth in union with its Head in heaven.

See: **The Catechism: #2664**

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