

TWENTY NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

One of the expectations that comes with the territory of being human is that if we commit ourselves to someone or something we should receive a return of sorts. For example, take golf. If we take up golf, embrace a regimen of practice and play consistently, we expect to improve our score and lower our handicap. And yet, even with the best effort and the greatest equipment, we could still fail miserably at golf. That is essentially what happened some years ago to a friend of mine who became so disheartened on the 17th hole that he threw his three-iron into the lake. In his disappointment and discouragement, he gave up. He just didn't throw in the towel—he threw in the iron.

When human expectations are increasingly unmet, we can become so discouraged to the extent that we give up. How many of us have had that disheartening feeling about prayer? We faithfully pray—sometimes it's the same place and same station; but whatever we expect is never realized. Our prayers seemingly go unheeded. And in that silence we become so disappointed that we reach a point in which we just cannot pray. In short—we give up.

Isn't it amazing how on the one hand prayer can be so good in as much as it yields peace, comfort and insight? And yet, on the other hand prayer can lead to intense disappointment and discouragement.

The Word of God today offers three powerful pointers to enhance our prayer life especially when we become disheartened.

First, in the reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear about the war waged between Amalek and Israel. As the battle unfolds, Moses ascends the mountain—traditionally the place where God meets His people—and raises His hands. As long as His hands are raised, Israel had the better of the fight. Although no mention is made here of prayer, that is essentially what Moses is doing by extending His hands. When Moses grows tired, Aaron and Hur support him. And, in the end, Amalek is defeated. The key here is the support Aaron and Hur render to Moses.

In our own lives when we grow weary and disheartened in prayer, we need the support of one another—for none of us are an island. We need one another—especially in discouragement. That is one of the blessings of Sunday Liturgy. Each week we come together as a community and draw strength and support from one another and that support can make all the difference.

Secondly, in St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, he calls for fidelity. He writes, "Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed." And St. Paul adds that this fidelity is not always convenient.

You know of all the realities in life that we choose to be faithful to-- none has more promise than prayer. So many graces and riches can flow from prayer in this life as well as the life to come. Prayer can be as deep as the ocean, and as powerful as the sun. But prayer is not like an ATM where we get instant results. No, prayer demands time. And the time here is God's—for His sense of time is different from ours. As a result we need to be faithful—that is we need to hang in there and keep at it.

Finally, in the Gospel we hear the parable of the unjust judge which encourages persistence in prayer. The thought is--if an unjust, dishonest judge gives in to a persistent woman, how much more quickly will the God of love and peace respond to our plea?

Just last week I bumped into someone whose husband is dying with cancer. After I asked her how he was doing she said, "Father, I keep praying every day for a miracle." Now that is someone who is persistent with prayer. And who knows, that persistence may pay off. It certainly will not be the first time.

Support, fidelity and persistence--each of these realities are integral parts of prayer. If any of us came to Church today feeling disheartened, discouraged or disappointed—perhaps we need a little more prayer in our life—or maybe that prayer needs some support, fidelity or persistence.

We began this reflection talking about human expectations. Let us not forget that there are also divine expectations as evidenced in today's Gospel—one of which is that we seek to pray always without becoming weary or losing heart. Let us not let God down.