

Homily
July 24, 2022
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
27:48 – 37:49

It is good to be back with you, having been gone last week to enjoy a “workation.” A workation is when you’re on vacation, but you’re working to help your sister Mary move. We had a wonderful time. Luckily it wasn’t as hot that week as it was this immediate past week. And I hear that Fr. Jim was here last week for this Mass and you got to encounter him once again, a former pastor. And the night before, Fr. Mike Welch was here, who was the administrator here before I arrived. So I am glad you were well cared-for. And I am also happy to be home.

Let me paint a familiar scene for you. A child approaches a parent. He or she wants something – a toy, a privilege, an adventure. The child asks. The response is no. A little later the child comes back and asks again. The response is still no. The child asks again, but this time also asks why. And the parent responds to the latter with their reasoning. And the response to the child is still no. (Is this starting to sound familiar?) The child asks again and reminds the parent of his or her earlier reasoning and then adds their own reasonable value or good to come from the granting of the request.

Well, the parent and the child begin to examine their reasons. They do this together and the response becomes a compromise. I see your reasoning. You see my reasoning. So here. You do this and I’ll do that. And the answer is now yes.

It’s a dance, isn’t it? The dance of the parent and the child. You all know what it’s like. (To Stephenie Paquette: Was Daniel like that? - Always.) It’s a dialogue of reasons, of values, of longings, of wants, of needs. And it’s a dialogue of mutual conclusion to yes.

We see such a dialogue today in our first reading from Genesis. It’s unusual that we have a sequential reading from Genesis or any Old Testament from one Sunday to the other, but in this case we do. Last week we heard of Abraham sharing in hospitality with the three visitors – two going off and one remaining for a meal. And the one who remained for the meal was the Lord.

In that moment and in the moment we have just heard in today’s passage, we can begin to sense a certain friendship that’s unfolding between the Lord and Abraham. Oh, they’re not friends equal. But still, there’s a mutual sharing that’s going on.

The Lord and Abraham have drawn close. They are friends. Abraham enters into a conversation with his friend. He is seeking to understand how the Lord thinks. The back-and-forth between them spirals toward an understanding of God's approach to just punishment on the one hand and God's compassion for the innocent on the other.

Each time Abraham's questions are answered. And God is revealed as a thoughtful God, an understanding God, a compassionate God. Abraham comes to know the way of God's thinking because he persisted.

Now, there's a reality that cannot be ignored if you read a little further in Genesis. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed for their wickedness. The two companions who had been in the initial encounter have gone to Sodom and Gomorrah and they draw to safety the innocent: Lot, his wife and their two daughters. Thus, God's ways are just. And God's ways for the innocent are upheld.

Our Gospel reading lays before us three episodes concerning prayer. The first is Jesus' teaching of his disciples the communal prayer, "Our Father." The second is Jesus' insistence on the importance of persistence in prayer. And the third is Jesus demonstrating the effectiveness of prayer. These second and third episodes are clearly connected to our passage from Genesis.

Persist in prayer. Prayer is effective.

Brothers and sisters, prayer is a dialogue. It's a give-and-take of speaking, of waiting, of listening. Prayer is a mutual sitting by one with the Lord. Like the child and the parent, like Abraham and the Lord, we must keep at our prayer to realize its effects.

The image of the uncooperative neighbor that Jesus tells uses an apt image. The one needing the bread, the loaves, is persistent. And the neighbor does not respond because of friendship, but rather because of the persistence. He actually wants to sleep. But he responds.

Jesus then goes on, as we heard, to tell us – ask, seek, knock – repeatedly. Keep up the dialogue with God.

Now, some of us don't ask, seek or knock because we hardly ever pray. Begin to pray.

Some of us don't ask because we think we're unworthy. We don't want to bother God with our trivial needs. So, we say it once and then we're done. The Lord says to ask it again. Tell the Lord again. You are worthy and I have told you this.

And some of us might say, well why keep reminding God of our needs or of my needs? He already knows them. He understands them. Why doesn't he just get over it and respond? Why do I have to remind him? Why? So that we will appreciate the answer that God gives us when it comes.

In fact, in many cases by the time the answer comes, we have ourselves – through our persistent prayer – found that we are asking really, wrongly. And so, we ask for something new. And we are surprised when that is answered.

Yes, my brothers and sisters, be persistent. Trust in the effectiveness of your prayer. Repeat it again and again. Whether it's thankfulness, or praying for another's need, praying for your own need, praying for a greater sense of purpose in life – whatever. Keep at it. The Lord will respond. In fact, he may respond by laying his Spirit upon you.