

**29th Sun of Ord (Ex 17:8-13; Lk 18:1-8)
2022**

16 October

Prayer: In this week's gospel we visit the parable of the persistent widow. This parable is about how a poor, powerless widow, using the only weapon in her arsenal, persists in nagging a corrupt, powerful judge to render a just decision on her behalf. The primary lesson of the parable is found in its first verse when Jesus encourages his disciples, "to pray always without becoming weary." The ultimate point of the parable being that if persistence pays off with an evil and corrupt judge, how much more will our persistence be rewarded by our loving, just and all-powerful God.

Today's first reading from the Book of Exodus offers its own demonstration of this truth. As long as Moses held up the staff of God, Israel was strong and prevailed in battle. But whenever he tired and lowered it, the enemy began to win. So it goes with our prayer lives. The less we pray, the further we move away from God and the less likely we are to experience our lives' desired outcomes. But did you notice that Moses' success could not be simply attributed to his efforts alone. Moses needed assistance. Seeing this, Aaron and Hur moved to support Moses and held his arms in the air so that the staff remained lifted up. And as it was held high, Israel overcame their enemy. We have this very simple, yet memorable illustration of our need for each other's help.

There's a principle in nature called "synergy." Synergy is the interaction of forces to produce a result greater than the sum of their separate parts. In just one example of this principle, you might be surprised to learn that a Belgian draft horse, working alone, is capable of pulling about 4 tons of weight, but two horses harnessed and pulling together can move over 11 tons! Through synergy, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Couldn't two or more people praying together have a similar synergistic effect?

I would be surprised if any of us could complain that we simply pray too much. Or for the matter, that we actually pray without ceasing. Sometimes, our desire to and prioritization of prayer can fall on the back burner. Wouldn't it be nice, if on those occasions, when we are preoccupied or distracted by life's challenges, if we had someone to support us in the same way that Aaron and Hur came to the assistance of Moses. In my experience, many of us are willing to pray FOR someone but most of us are reluctant to pray WITH someone. And yet, if you look at successful spiritual renewal programs like Christ Renews His Parish, or Kairos, or Cursillo, or Prayer Partners, or the Charismatic Renewal or even Small Church or Faith Sharing Groups, shared prayer, the experience of praying together is fundamental to those programs' success. For that matter, we have gathered here today, in this place, for a celebration of shared prayer. Arguably, the highest form of shared prayer. Together we offer synergistic thanks and praise.

Admittedly, most of the time, I pray alone. And while I certainly do enjoy the benefits of my solitary prayer time, I must admit that I feel his presence most strongly when I'm praying with others. I believe lifting one another in prayer is one of the richest experiences we can share. Together, we are strengthened and blessed in a unique way by the Holy Spirit. Even a simple shared prayer before a meal or at bedtime brings God to the forefront of our lives and helps us to feel closer to God and to each other.

Some of us discount the need for prayer. Some believe that our all-knowing God, who recognizes every star by name, surely knows what lies in the recesses of our hearts and minds, even before we are aware of them. And that is true! Therefore, we must conclude that our prayers are not for God's benefit at all. Instead, when we pray, we are the benefactors of that prayer. Every time we engage God in prayer, we recognize his supremacy and we grow deeper in relationship with him. Each time we pray, we recognize our dependence on God and we recognize that our happiness ultimately rests in him. And by engaging him, and being comforted by him, we grow in our love for him. Of course, God wants us to pray with persistence. He embraces every opportunity to share his infinite love with us and he welcomes our every encounter as an occasion to grow closer to him.

So let us pray. Let us pray individually and let us pray both for and with one another. For the more we pray, the more likely it is that when the Son of Man returns, he WILL find faith on earth.