

Homily for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Well, we made it back home safe and sound from our parish mission trip to Kingston, Jamaica with the Missionaries of the Poor – just way sooner than we ever anticipated. We left at 1am on Sept. 30th, and got back home at 5pm on Oct. 3rd. Why? Because of Hurricane Matthew. By the time we got to Jamaica, it was then a Category 5 storm, with winds over 155 mph, and the track had it going right toward the eastern part of the island. And we didn't want to, but most of us felt like the prudent choice was to leave early. And so, after a group conscience and an hour on the phone with American Airlines representatives, leave early we did, as we booked flights back home.

Now, some might ask, “Why did you even put yourselves through all of that, and just not go in the first place?” Well, all I can say is that we really knew the Lord was calling us to serve. We knew the Missionaries of the Poor were counting on us to bring suitcases full of medicines and supplies and sneakers. We knew the Brothers would really benefit from the money donations we brought for various projects and needs. And we knew that we ourselves would really benefit from serving the poorest of the poor. And, when I look back on those not even 48 hours we were there, we were blessed to fulfill those missions.

As Mother Teresa has said, “We are called not to be successful, but to be faithful.” And faithful we were. We couldn’t control the weather, the forecast, the flights, or a plethora of other things. But we did choose to be faithful to God’s call to go and serve in the name of Jesus.

I think St. Paul in writing his letter to Timothy, as we heard in today’s second reading, also expresses this truth. Paul writes, “I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus...[for] if we persevere we shall also reign with him.” Our lives as Christians is not a sprint or a 50-yard dash – it’s a marathon. And a marathon takes perseverance.

On our mission trip to Jamaica there was certainly a lot we had to persevere through – extreme heat and humidity, leaving behind many of the comforts of home (like air-conditioning), and finding ourselves with ever changing schedules (actually there’s a saying with the Missionaries of the Poor – S.T.C. – “Subject To Change” – and just about every few hours there was an S.T.C. causing us to change course). But, Jesus never said it would be easy. He just promised to give us the grace needed to persevere.

Similarly in our daily lives here in the good ole US of A, we need to daily rely on the grace of God to help us keep going. Maybe you're going through a really difficult time right now. Maybe it's health, or family. Maybe it's your work life or your personal life. Whatever it is, the Lord wants you to see past the constraints you feel in the present, and know that with His grace the good you yearn for is there. But we never know how that grace will come to us – the places, the circumstances, or the people. We just need to be open in faith.

I know for me, one real example of this took place in a short visit we made to one of the centers the Missionaries of the Poor operate. It was a center for people with physical and mental disabilities. In the one open room, I came across a woman – I never learned her name – who just seemed distraught. She was sitting on her bed and wasn't able to communicate verbally. But as I learned, love doesn't always need a spoken language to be understood. So, I reached out and embraced her, and she just smiled. Then, I prayed over her, and gave her a blessing, and I could just see peace envelop her.

The people, the places, the circumstances – we often don't know how God's grace will come to us through them to enable us to persevere. However, one way we do know for sure is the Eucharist we receive today – the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. May God nourish us with His grace through this sacrament so that we can keep persevering as we journey together through life. God bless you.