

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In our Gospel this week from St. Luke, Jesus tells us a parable about the necessity of praying always without becoming weary. That's an interesting word – “weary” – isn't it? I decided to look it up in the dictionary, and I found it means the following two things: First – “lacking strength, energy, or freshness because of a need for rest or sleep”. Ok, does that describe anyone here today? Anyone lacking energy because of being tired? Probably describes a lot of us. And the second meaning – “bored or annoyed by something because you have seen it, heard it, or done it many times or for a long time”. I'm happy to say that over the course of my 10 years of ordained ministry, and preaching over 1,500 times – and that's just weekends – I'm not growing weary of giving homilies!

But Jesus, isn't talking about energy levels or homilies. He's talking about prayer. So, have you ever felt weary when it comes to praying? Again, taking the first of those first two definitions, maybe you've felt tired when you entered into prayer. Ever fall asleep praying the rosary, or doze off while trying to read the Bible? And how about that second definition – “bored or annoyed by something because you have seen it, heard it, or done it many times or for a long time”?

Hmm.

You may have heard it said before that “familiarity breeds contempt”. But, it also seems that familiarity can breed weariness too. For example, even when it comes to the perfect prayer – Mass. We come to Mass week in and week out. And have you ever felt annoyed because you had to go to Mass, or bored while you were at Mass? Be honest. The same could be asked of our daily prayer lives too – ever get weary because you’ve asked God for something a thousand times, and nothing seems to change? Or have you ever been frustrated because you get so distracted during prayer, or because you just don’t feel anything when you pray? It’s easy to get weary when it comes to prayer. And Jesus understands this – that’s why He’s telling the parable in the first place!

And what’s the temptation here? To give up. To stop coming to Mass because “I’m not getting anything out of it”. To give up praying daily unless I have a problem or someone in my family is really sick. To get weary. To become despondent. To just give up.

But what does Jesus have to say? Well, He did speak about this judge who “neither feared God nor respected any human being” and this widow who used to come to him and say, ‘Render a just decision for me against my adversary.’ And Jesus said that this judge could have cared less about God or this woman, but because he was concerned about himself – that this woman might come and hit him – he decided to make a just decision for her after all.

And what are the lessons Jesus wants us to learn from this parable? Well, I can think of two big things. Number one: When Jesus teaches us about the importance of praying continually, He doesn't mean that we have to be praying at every moment of every day. Rather, fidelity to God is to be what motivates our prayer. In other words, if we look at prayer, including Mass, as solely an obligation, a duty, or something we have to do – of course, we're going to become weary. However, if we see prayer as it truly is – as an opportunity for growing in our personal relationship with Jesus – of being in satisfying communion with the living God – then of course we won't easily grow weary.

As for the second lesson, consider the following. If the persistent pleading of this helpless widow is ultimately fruitful, how much more will our persistent praying to our loving Father in heaven achieve? In other words, if that unjust judge yielded to the pleadings of an annoying widow, how much more will a gracious God who loves us perfectly hear us when we pray? In fact, Jesus says in our Gospel today, "Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily."

That's nice. But sometimes people say to me: "But, Father, I don't know how to pray." And what I say is, "you don't have to know how". Just do it – for, it's in praying that we actually learn how to pray. Having a meaningful relationship with God in many ways is like having a personal relationship with anyone: no one may formally teach us how to; but by making regular, quality time for another, and truly caring about him or her, we learn what it means to be a friend and have a friend. And so, my friends, don't be weary when it comes to prayer. Daily prayer is absolutely essential if we're going to grow in our spiritual lives. But whether you've been trying to pray for 5 years or 95 years, don't get discouraged. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." God bless you.