

Homily
Sunday, October 17, 2004
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
by Sister Mary Catherine Antczak, O.P.

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8

Today Jesus teaches us about prayer. He tells his disciples that prayer is a necessity, that we must pray always, and that we must pray “without becoming weary” or, as another translation says, “never losing heart.” To help us understand prayer, he tells a story about a poor widow who repeatedly asks a judge to listen to her and to grant her justice.

Jesus tells us that prayer is a necessity. If I believe Jesus’ words, then I realize that prayer is not an option, an extracurricular activity. Prayer is part of who I am. Like any necessity, I can’t live without prayer. I need to pray. I need God. I need to talk to God, and I need to be with God. In that sense, I recognize in myself the neediness and humility of the widow. She needed justice, and so she relentlessly pestered an uncaring judge to listen to her petition; finally, he listened to her because of her perseverance. In a similar but different way, I must humble myself before our loving God, not tiring to pour out my heart to him because I know how much I need him.

Jesus teaches us to pray continually. How can this be? If I grow in my realization that prayer is a necessity, then gradually, I learn what it means to pray continually. I come to understand that what I truly need is a deep personal relationship with God. Through my awareness of God present within me and my relationship with God, I will grow more comfortable voicing my needs and opening up my heart to God in all that happens to me. Getting up, driving to work on the freeway, eating my lunch, remembering a sick friend, fighting a temptation to gossip, watching TV, singing at Mass on Sunday—in all these circumstances I will find that I can turn to God, talk to God, just the way I talk to a good friend. Through my life experiences and my ability to talk to God about them, I begin to learn that this is what it means to pray always.

Praying always is not easy. Sometimes it’s hard and feels like darkness. God can seem far away. Words can dry up. Petitions go unanswered. This is why Jesus teaches us to pray without losing heart, without becoming weary. In such moments I must hear Jesus speak to me: “do not lose heart, do not grow weary.” Like the widow of the Gospel parable, I need to keep raising my voice even when I have no hint or consolation that God hears my prayer.

To pray like this, to experience the necessity of prayer, and to seek to pray always is the life work for one who loves God. To become a person of prayer presupposes that I am a person of faith, deep faith. This is why Jesus gave us the example of a poor widow, a model of perseverance and deep faith, when he taught us about prayer. Like the widow of the Gospel, I need the gift of faith to pray. Only with that faith will I be able to pray. Only with faith will I be able to respond yes, when Jesus asks the final question of today’s parable on prayer: When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?