



### “FERTILIZING THE HARVEST THROUGH INTERCESSORY PRAYER”

Recently, I read a chapter in a book on the power of intercessory prayer. It touched my heart very much. It made me think: what would happen to our parish (and perhaps to our families and workplace) if all of us or even many of us had a strong conviction about the power of intercessory prayer. The book I was reading is called *Growing Teen Disciples*—a most wonderful book for anyone interested in Youth Ministry. The title of chapter five is the title of this column. The author is Frank Mercadante. He opens the chapter with the following testimony to the power of intercessory prayer.

*Fresh out of college, I was hired as a full-time youth minister in a parish with little history of youth ministry and no on-going programming for teens. My job was to build a youth ministry program from scratch.*

*Things were slow during my first summer. Teens were not yet hanging around the parish, nor were there any programs planned. Consequently, I found myself with a loss of time on my hands.*

*With the time I had, I prayed every day for each individual high school teen registered in the parish. Don't get me wrong—it wasn't simply a time-filler for a guy bored to death and desperate to justify his full-time position. I believed in prayer—at least theoretically. I had no idea, however, how practical and powerful this incredible God-given resource is. I still marvel at the power God releases through this simple investment of time and love.*

*The benefits were numerous. First, as a result of praying for each teen on the list, I became very familiar with their names. Consequently, it only took a quick introduction for me to remember who they were. I discovered that these teens, like most of us, appreciated the fact that I was able to call them by name so quickly.*

*Second, I noticed substantial numerical growth in attendances as that first year progressed. Our first evangelistic program attracted a total of twelve teens. By the end of the year we were seeing over 120 teens attending this same program. We grew over 1000 percent in numbers! That was exciting, but there was something going on that was far more significant in impact.*

*Amazingly, I found teen after teen attempting to articulate to me both awkwardly and profoundly, his or*

*her experience of a spiritual hunger. It was not uncommon for me to hear teens say things like, “I feel empty inside. I feel like that missing piece is God. How can I have a relationship with the Lord?”*

*It seemed so apparent to me that this spiritual hunger for a personal relationship with God was a direct answer to the hours of prayer in behalf of these teens.*

After reading the above, I felt convicted of failing to be much more involved in intercessory prayer than I presently am. Yes, I do some. But now I realize that it needs to be *more often, more intense and more focused.*

Just what a difference powerful, ongoing intercessory prayer would make to the following ministries.

- Our school, our Religious Education program, including our Youth Ministry.
- Our men/women's retreat weekends and our Adult bible Study groups and Small Christian Community.
- Our outreach programs including to non-church going Catholics.

What if we could organize what Mercadante calls *Intercessory Prayer Directors* for each of the above ministries? What if we acted on the axiom: “*act as if all depended on oneself, but pray as if all depended on God.*” All too often, we act as if all depended on us. Mercadante writes:

*Ministry solely funded by human strength lacks the ability to bring about a true conversion of heart, and sooner or later will result in spiritual atrophy. When this happens, we must admit that we have been better Americans than Christians. Prayer taps into a power that far transcends the abilities of humans. As someone once said: “Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.”*

Beginning with myself, I wish each of us and *each ministry* in our parish that seeks to move and change hearts would meditate on the above and then ask: how would action on the above make a difference in our ministry?

Further on in his chapter on Intercessory prayer, Mercadante writes:

*Basil Pennington wrote, “intercessory prayer is not a question of a lot of prayers; it is a question of a lot of*

love.” *Intercessory prayer, plain and simple, is about loving others enough to embrace their needs as one’s own, and on their behalf, take them to the throne of God.*

*Effective intercession is grounded in compassion. It was Jesus’ deep compassion for the crowds, whom he described as sheep without a shepherd, that led him to teach his disciples to pray for more workers to be sent into the fields.*

*If we truly love others, we will want to give them more than what is naturally possible; it is this love that motivates us towards intercessory prayer. Prayer is a sacrificial act of love. We leave our own agendas, worries, and issues behind to focus our energies towards the concerns of others. What we seek for them is something we, ourselves, could never deliver: the intervention of an all-loving, and all-powerful God.*

*As Walter Wink rightly states, “history belongs to the intercessors. . . .” God has given us an incredible resource that has the potential to radically influence and change global, national, regional, and personal history.*

*Anthony de Mello, S. J., elaborates further, “It is only at the end of this world that we shall realize how the destinies of persons and nations have been shaped, not so much by the external actions of powerful men and by events that seemed inevitable, but by the quiet, silent, irresistible prayer of persons the world will never know.”*

After the above, Mercadante writes about asking God to provide us with the grace to be intercessors. It could be a simple prayer like: “*Lord, grant me the heart of an intercessor.*”

Mercadante talks about appointing an *Intercessory Prayer Director* (1. P.D.) to his Youth Ministry. His role would be like that of Moses during the Israelites battle with the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-13). At Rephidim the Amalekites waged war against the Israelites. Moses sent Joshua and his army to engage Amalek in battle, while he remained on top of a hill above them. As long as Moses had his hands raised, Israel had the better of the fight. When Moses’ arms collapsed with fatigue, Amalek began to win. Soon, Aaron and Hur positioned themselves on each side of Moses and helped support his arms until Amalek was soundly defeated.

Military history may attribute the win to Joshua, but it was the intercessory efforts of Moses, assisted by Aaron and Hur, that won the spiritual battle. Moses may not have lifted a finger in battle, but his lifted hands in prayer supplied the needed strength for the warriors below to achieve the victory. Similarly, the Intercessory Prayer Director may not be directly involved in the day-

to-day ministry with teens, but it is his or her efforts that assist the youth workers in making an impact.

So my brothers and sisters what if our parish grew strong in this whole area of intercessory prayer beginning with our staff and moving out from there. The Good News is that we have many resources at our finger tips:

- Our **Adoration Chapel** where we have parishioners already praying day and night.
- Our large number of retirees especially those of you who no longer can be involved in active ministry. Can you begin to *imagine the difference* you could make to the life of our parish if you became an intercessor and prayer warrior for your parish? From your prayer chair, *you* would be the one changing the hearts of people we are trying to reach in our pre-cana programs, baptismal seminar, religious education program etc., etc.

To get us started on this we need someone who

- Has a heart for this ministry.
- And is blessed with organizational skills.

Is there anyone like that out there? If so, think and pray about it and contact me. Or if this article touches your heart in some way let me know. In the meantime, I give you the following pastoral needs to be praying about.

- Please pray for the Lord’s blessing on our **New Faith Formation program**. *You are invited*. Please see page nine (9) of this bulletin for more details about our March 24 event.
- Praying for the sick. At a few Masses, we have prayed for some individuals with cancer or other problems with good results. I believe that this Ministry could be a lot more.

## **The Gospel—A Clear Call to Repentance**

The following is the commentary I wrote on this week’s gospel for the *Small Christian Communities*, a commentary used by several parishes in Brevard and in other parts of the country. It is available each week on our parish website.

### **GOSPEL: Luke 13:13-19**

Today’s Gospel makes reference to two disasters, which Jesus is asked to comment on. The people asking Jesus to comment seemed to believe that bad things happened to the victims because they were sinners. The absence of bad things in the questioners lives implied that they were righteous and not in need of repentance.

Jesus quickly sets his questioners straight on this issue: “Bad things didn’t happen to the victims in either incident because they were unrighteous or bad people. And the absence of bad things in your lives does not mean that you are not in need of repentance. Indeed you are.” Jesus says: “*You are all in need of repentance and if you do not repent, you will perish.*” The unrepentant will suffer a fate worse than the victims of the disaster. Jesus uses the two terrible events as a metaphor for the catastrophic ending that awaits those who refuse to repent. Jesus is saying the big tragedy in life is not being abused or killed accidentally. Rather, true tragedy rests in the hearts of each of us and our capacity to reject God’s call to repentance and a change of heart.

Jesus is saying to his audience and to us: “Don’t be preoccupied with why bad things happen to people. Rather, be concerned about the condition of your own soul.” When people are tragically killed, it is indeed awful. But, in Jesus’ mind, a worse tragedy is a mind and heart closed to God. *No one* can afford to be spiritually complacent.

Then Jesus tells the parable of the *Fig Tree*, sometimes called “*The Parable of the Second Chance.*” The owner of the fig tree notices that it is bearing no fruit, so he wants to cut it down. The vinedresser asks that it be given one more chance. “*Sir, leave it for another year.*” The fig tree represents Israel. The Vinedresser represents God. Just as the gardener is patient with the fig tree, so is God patient with sinners. In his youth, Moses killed a man, but God didn’t write him off. God saw immense potential in this former murderer and called him to carry out a great mission. Church history is full of examples of barren fig trees that, in time, became fruitful, e.g., Paul, Augustine, Thomas Merton. But the parable also makes it clear that time may run out on the unrepentant. If people refuse chance after chance to turn their lives around, God will not quit on them, but they will, by deliberate choice, shut themselves out of God’s Kingdom. This parable calls us to be fruitful trees in God’s Vineyard.

Have a Prayerful week,

*Le Saran*