



PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER “HANG—IN—THERE”

When it comes to prayer, all of us are called to persist or “hang-in-there”. This is especially true when we are praying for a particular intention. *Persistence* is a message found in all three readings in today’s liturgy of the word.

Moses—A Powerful Example of a Prayer Warrior.

In the first reading, the Israelites, led by Moses and Joshua, are making their way through the desert heading for the Promised Land. As they journey, they are often attacked. In today's reading, their enemy is Amalek and his army. Moses orders Joshua to take some men to battle the Amalekites. While the army is fighting, Moses goes to a hill from where he can see the battle and where he also prays for victory. When Moses persevered in prayer all went well for his people, but when he grew tired of praying the battle went against them. We also, notice in the story that Moses had Aaron and Hur to support him in prayer.

This reading is a great story about the importance of backing up prayer with action or supporting our action with prayer. The following story told by Fr. Flor McCarthy helps to underline the importance of combining prayer with action and action with prayer.

Three men were trapped in a dark cellar which had no doors or windows. How did they react to their predicament?

The first was a writer by the name of George. He had no faith. He just sat there cursing the darkness. "There's nothing we can do," he said despairingly. "We might as well resign ourselves to our fate."

The second was Peter, who was a very religious man. He prayed for a long time. When he had finished, he sat back and waited for a miracle.

The third man was a bricklayer by the name of Ivan. He was quite religious in his own way. But he was also a very practical man. He had a small chisel in his pocket. With the light of a match he found a small stone. Using this as a hammer he began to chip away at the wall.

The work was slow, monotonous and extremely tiring. He got dust in his eyes, and blisters on his hands. Neither of the other two showed any inclination to help him. George sat in one corner smoking. Peter sat in another corner praying. From time to time Ivan too prayed: "Dear God, I believe that with your help we can make it out of here. So help us now."

Finally, after hours of painful work, a big stone dislodged itself and light streamed in from next door. He began to shout for joy, praising and thanking God at the same time. His two companions helped him to widen the hole, and eventually all three crawled through and were free.

Here we see three different attitudes to prayer. For George it was a waste of time. Since he had no faith, his attitude was logical. If you don't believe in God, who can you pray to? For Peter, prayer was a substitute for action. Once he had prayed, he sat back and waited for God to come to his rescue. A lot of our prayer is like that, especially our prayer on behalf of others. It's just words, and an excuse for doing nothing.

Ivan believed in prayer, not however as a substitute for action, but as a spur to action. Having prayed, he immediately took whatever action he could. His prayer served the purpose of keeping up his courage and hope. It also gave him a sense of God's nearness, and an assurance that God had not abandoned him. He drew great strength from this.

If we look at the First Reading we will see Ivan's view of prayer in action. On their journey to the Promised Land, the Israelites were set upon by the Amalekites. In their struggle they relied on the prayer of Moses, not as an excuse for doing nothing, but as a spur to action. And Jesus urges us in the Gospel to pray continually and never lose heart.

Prayer does make a difference. It sustains us. Those who pray rarely or never lose heart. When we turn our thoughts to God, we feel a new strength in our soul, in our entire being. "Without divine assistance I cannot succeed; with it I cannot fail." (Abraham Lincoln)

I believe that we can safely say that sometimes the reason God is not answering our prayer is that our prayer is not backed up with action. Conversely, we can say that one reason God does not bless our action

is that it is not supported by prayer. In the above story, Ivan beautifully combines action with prayer.

Timothy- Preacher of the Word

In the second reading, Paul is exhorting Timothy to persevere in being faithful to scripture and to the ministry of teaching and preaching. Paul uses powerful and strong words when addressing Timothy.

I charge you in the presence of God and Jesus... to proclaim the Word be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

As a church, as a priest and as a lay person we are called to be faithful to God's word. We are charged to preach the truth about life, justice, sexuality issues whether it is politically correct or incorrect. Sometimes our witness or preaching may be rejected or resented. It doesn't matter, we must continue to do and speak the truth.

A Relentless Widow

In the Gospel, a little powerless widow is seeking justice from a godless, incorrupt judge. In the end, the judge, judges in favor of the woman not because he cares about her, but because he wants to get her off his back. Her one resource in the face of stagnate bureaucracies and lazy tribunals was sheer relentlessness.

One of the best known examples of persistent prayer is St. Monica who prayed for 20+ years for the conversion of her wayward son, Augustine. "Can't", a popular word with some children and adults was not found in the vocabulary of Moses, Timothy, the poor widow or St. Monica. Today, all of us who are disciples of Jesus are challenged to purge "can't" from our vocabulary and replace it with prayerful, faith-filled perseverance. Concerning the word persistence, Harry Truman once said: *Nothing in the world can take its place. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with great talent. Genius will not' unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence, determination alone are paramount.*"

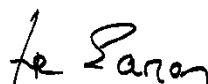
The Mystery of Unanswered Prayer

Some of our prayers, it would seem go unanswered. Why? Really only God knows—the God who says in

Isaiah, "my thoughts are not my thoughts nor are you ways my ways". (55:8). The following reflection by Fr. Basil Pennington may or may not help us as we struggle with what appears to be unanswered prayer. He writes:

God will give us whatever we want, asking in prayer—what we truly want, not what we say we want or even think we want. God listens to the heart, not to the lips. He knows, too, how limited is our understanding and knowledge. He sees our truest desires and knows how they can best be fulfilled. And this is what he grants. We may not see it at the moment, but we will in time. . . If good seems to be saying "No" to some prayers, it is because he is saying "Yes" to the deepest prayer of our hearts.

Have a blessed week,



PRAYER OF SURRENDER

**Lord Jesus, I give you my hands
to do your work.
I give you my feet to go your way.
I give you my eyes to see as you see.
I give you my tongue to speak
your words.
I give you my mind that you may
think in me.
I give you my spirit that you
may pray in me.
Above all, I give you my heart
that you may love in me.
Love the Father and all humanity.
I give you my whole self that you may
grow in me, so that you,
Lord, may be the one who lives,
and works, and prays in me.
Amen.**