

**29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C**  
***“Don’t lose heart!”***

I said St. Luke was a great story teller. Here is another one. And, like others recently, like the ten lepers last week, the rich man and Lazarus two weeks before, and the clever servant the week before that, we have to wrestle with it. The picture Luke paints is not pretty. A defenseless, powerless widow is at odds with a heartless judge who feared neither God nor any man. The odds were stacked against her. She didn’t have a chance to get what she wanted from him, but no one else could help her. She was stuck with him, and he, as it turned out, was stuck with her. She was relentless in her appeals to him, a real pain in the neck, like a pit bull who wouldn’t let go till she got what she wanted. Finally, in desperation, to get her off his back, the judge settles her case, I assume in her favor.

This parable is not an allegory. God is not the judge, and we are not the widow. Rather, the story presents an argument from the lesser to the greater. If a callous, insensitive judge will respond because of the persistence of a helpless widow, how much more will God, our Father, who is merciful and just, respond to our prayers, we who are his children? Therefore, don’t lose heart. Don’t give up on God. The only prayers that are not answered are the prayers we stop saying. St. Luke tells us we are to be bold, not shy, in what we pray for. *“Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses. Deliver us from the evil one.”* Now, this week we are told to be persistent in our prayer. And lest we think this is giving us permission to be arrogant in our prayer, like we have some entitlement to what God can give us, next week we are told to be humble when we pray. But that’s for next week.

Now, we have all prayed for things we didn't get, like the healing of a child, the safety of a loved one at war, or whatever. Well, for some people, prayer can be a way of putting God to the test, and if he doesn't give them what they want, God fails our test, and they can think they have good reason to stop praying altogether. They may even stop going to church. What persistent prayer does, rather than change God's mind on something, - Do we really think we are more merciful or understanding than God? - it allows God's grace to help us through whatever challenge we must face if our prayer isn't answered as we want. Even at such times, Jesus is telling us not to lose heart. Over the years, having been down the road of prayers answered and unanswered by people in the parish, I hold on to the promise that Jesus does make to us. He promises to give us the Holy Spirit. He promises to be with us, no matter what happens. He is calling us to be faithful, yes, even when things go wrong. Considering all that goes wrong in our world everyday, I can see why Jesus asks, "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*"

But it is the first line of today's gospel reading that sets up this whole issue of prayer. "*Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.*" Is Jesus telling us it is necessary for us to pray always? Give me a break! Who does he think we are? Does he want us all to be cloistered nuns or hermits? Is he being realistic here? Well, if by prayer he means saying words consciously, like in formal and informal prayers, there is no way. But what else could he have in mind? Well, there is something thing we do all the time, and if we stop doing it, we will die. Sometimes we think of it, but most of the time we don't. I'm talking about breathing; taking in air and giving it out. If we stop

breathing, we will die. Sometimes we take deep breaths, but most of the time we just do it without giving it a thought.

Prayer is the breath of the Body of Christ. Without prayer, the Church will die. Sometimes we are conscious of our prayers, like at Mass, or before meals or the end of the day, or when praying the Rosary or visiting the Blessed Sacrament. This is why prayer is so important in the family, the little church. I do not see how a married couple in the church can be a vibrant Sacrament of Christ's love to the Church if they do not consciously pray together on some regular basis. We need to breathe in the grace of God's love and then let it out in the way we treat one another.

But can prayer be done unconsciously, without thinking about it, like breathing? Well, it's an analogy and all analogies limp, but I think so. We can make our whole life a prayer by offering all we say and do throughout the day in service to God. And throughout the day, we call ourselves into the presence of God when dealing with people at work, or on the congested freeway. We begin the day by offering ourselves as we are, our prayers, works, joys and sufferings to God. I begin each day with the **Prayer of Abandonment** of Brother Charles de Foucauld.

*Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me as you will. Whatever you do, I thank you. I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me and in your creation. – I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul, I offer it to you with all the love in my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.*

And when you think about it, isn't this what we are about to do at this Mass? We surrender ourselves to our Father, in union with Jesus. Whatever happens happens. It's okay. Do not lose heart. We are not alone.