

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – C October 21, 2007

Exodus 17:8-13 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2 Luke 18:1-8

I've always thought that God must look forward
to the playoffs and the World Series
because when that time of year comes around,
there are fewer teams and their fans praying for victory -
so God's decision about whose prayer to answer is that much easier!

(That's if you believe that God indeed has a hand in deciding who wins ball games.)

People ask me all the time to pray for them,
and to pray for family members and friends
and to pray for particular needs.

And I do pray for them.

I lift them and their loved ones and their needs in prayer before God,
like Aaron and Hur lifting up Moses' arms.

And sometimes there comes healing, or a recovery, or a reconciliation,
or a job, or peace of mind.

But sometimes, what we pray for doesn't come
or is so long in coming that we begin to think it never will,
or we're tempted to think that God hasn't heard us,
or has forgotten or ignored our prayer.

When that happens, some people give up on prayer
and some even give up on God.
or at least give up on expecting God to answer our prayer as we want.

But my experience tells me that most folks don't give up.
Most people continue to believe and to pray,
and to seek God's help again when they are in need.

Are such folks foolish in seeking again the help of God
who so often seems not to help?

No. They're not foolish.

Rather, they've come to realize, or they understand, they accept
that when we turn to God in prayer
- especially when our needs are most acute -
one of the greatest benefits of prayer is the assurance or the reassurance
that we have a place to turn to, someone to go to,
when it seems no one else can help us.

When we were children,
we looked up to adults to fix our broken toys, our broken bones,

our broken hearts and our broken dreams.
There were times when mom or dad, or others did indeed fix what was broken.
And sometimes they could not.
But that didn't keep us from going back to them
with the next toy or feeling that needed fixing.
Not at all.
Because we knew that even if our parents couldn't fix what was broken,
most moms and dads would be there, and would hold us,
and comfort us and grieve the brokenness with us
- especially - if they could not make it better.

And so it is with God and us.

I don't know why God, who could do anything and everything,
so often - does not.
But just as you hear parents say how they wish they could take away
their children's brokenness and make it their own
so does the Lord say –and do – the same thing.

Our God is no stranger to brokenness and its pain
and, on the cross, he took all our brokenness on himself
and made it his own.
And in his moment of most acute need he cried out to God
who seemed to be abandoning him – and no answer came.
At least no answer came until after Christ abandoned himself
to his Father's will - and to death.

The greater the need, the more painful the brokenness:
the more fervently we pray for the Lord's help
knowing that the one answer that will always come, without fail,
is God's voice saying, like a loving mother, like a loving father,
"I am here... I am with you... I will not leave you..."

God may not grant what we pray for
but without fail he will be with us in and through our time of need.
The best gift prayer has to offer us is not so much the granting of our desire
as it is the opportunity to grow in our relationship with God
not because God will always fix us,
but because he lives with us in our brokenness.

We are about to break bread which the Lord will make his body,
broken for us that we might remember and know
that he is here... that he is with us... that he will not abandon us...

May Christ broken on the Cross and broken as the bread of his supper
heal the brokenness we bring to his table today.

- Rev. Austin Fleming