Study Notes for the Sunday Mass, October 20, 2013 – 29'th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Once upon a time there was a woman who enjoyed an abundant life with many friends and material blessings. Even the weather smiled on her as she lived in a region where it was nice most of the time. This lady went to worship services every week and enjoyed fellowshipping with her friends from the community. One of the things that she enjoyed most was shopping at the market near the largest and most beautiful lake in the country. This person felt loved and accepted and was very thankful for all that God had granted to her.

One day, things began to change. This blessed woman started getting very weak and was troubled by a wound that no matter what she did just wouldn't stop bleeding. She went to the local doctor and when he couldn't find a cure she spent more money and went to all of the doctors in the region. However, no doctor was able to solve her chronic medical condition. This was very troublesome for her because as time went by it became common knowledge around town that she was sick from this certain disease. Because her faith community considered blood to be unclean those with whom she worshipped began to consider *her* unclean. In fact, the leaders prohibited her from even entering the worship center until she could find a cure. The people in her faith community wouldn't help because remember, she was considered unclean. She longed to go down to the market and buy the things that she used to. To make matters worse she had spent so much on the doctors that she didn't have much money left to buy food there anyway. She had no one to turn to except God. Every day she poured out her heart in prayer and begged Him to heal her. Years passed yet she continued

to slide deeper into despair.

The situation for the women in the story was dire. If we consider our own lives, how bad do things have to get before we pray? What circumstances would have to arise in order for us to pray for others? We shared the story because it helps set the stage for the Gospel lesson later in this week's study.

The story of the woman with the incurable disease is found in the Bible in the Gospel of Saint Luke, Chapter 8.

> *43 And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, 44 came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45 And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You." 46 But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." 47 When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (Luke 8:43-48 NASB)*

The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease. How bad do things have to get before <u>we</u> pray? Regardless of our circumstances, **God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey**. This includes praying not only about our needs but also for the needs of others.

The woman in Luke 8 was a person who turned to Jesus in faith. Another great person of faith in the Bible was Moses. The Scripture says that he, "chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Let's move to the first reading to see an instance of how this godly man prevailed through a close walk with God in prayer. The context was a battle with the Amelekites just after God's provision of manna for food and water from a rock in the Wilderness of Sin, an appropriate title for the way the people had been behaving! "Why now have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst" (v. 3)? Did the Hebrew exiles really believe that God didn't know that they needed water to drink and for their animals?

> *Exodus 17:8-13 NIV 8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." 10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up– one on one side, one on the other– so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

In the story Moses acted as what is known as a "type" of Christ. A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. In this case, Moses' actions through praying with his staff and outstretched arms prefigured the *antitype* Jesus Christ, the one to whom people would eventually look to for their ultimate victory of sin and the devil. During the battle the people were compelled to look to Moses for victory or face certain annihilation. Moses was a type of Christ who acted as an intercessor between the people and God. In Deuteronomy 18 Moses said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him (v. 15, emphasis added). Moses knew to whom this verse pointed, the future Savior that we know as Jesus. Moses acted as God's appointed leader for His chosen people during this tremendous time of trouble. As long as the people of God looked to Moses with his outstretched arms calling out to God they were victorious in battle. However, when they shifted their focus away from Moses (and God) the advantage moved to the enemy. In the same way we must focus our attention upon God, both in prayer and through the dedication of our thoughts and actions. Prayer and reading of the Bible are the two main ways in which we communicate with God.

Moving onto the second reading for today we find some remarkable truths about the source and value of Scripture. Understanding Scripture is important for us because the more we know the Bible, the better we understand God! Prayer is about deepening our relationship with God. Memorizing is also important because we don't always have a Bible available at the times when we may need it. Let's read from Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy.

> *2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2 NIV 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and*

encourage– with great patience and careful instruction.

In the reading today Paul provided some foundational principles for living as a Christian. He said that the source of Scripture was from God the Holy Spirit, the breath of God (v. 16a). He affirmed that salvation was through faith in Jesus (v. 15). The result of learning the Scriptures was that they "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v.15), and "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (17a). Paul called believers to minister to people through the Word of God, whether it was convenient or inconvenient, and said to do so with "great patience and careful instruction" (4:2b). Paul's foundational teaching was very important to the church at this time because it revealed the great value of Scripture, something for which believers in the early church had to be willing to die.

Let's move onto the Gospel lesson from Luke 18:1-8. This is another in a series of parables and happened after Jesus' return to Jerusalem from Samaria where he had healed a group of lepers that we discussed last week. As you read, see if you can catch the rhetorical method Jesus used known as "arguing from lesser to greater."

> *Luke 18:1-8 NIV 1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

Let us back up a bit and briefly look at how Jesus taught using parables. His method for teaching through this genre was to provide a simple story in order to illustrate a significant spiritual truth. We have to be careful to try to make a parable "walk on all fours." Instead, our objective must be to search for the single intended meaning. There may be multiple applications in our lives with the single meaning gleaned from the parable. In this particular story, Jesus made it very easy for us in that he stated the spiritual meaning before he told the story. "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (v.1). Jesus call was to be persistent in prayer while waiting on God's timing. The theological application of this spiritual truth was that God is faithful by teaching us the necessity of prayer.

Examine the parable more closely. The story was about a widow who through her constant pleading finally convinced the "unjust judge" to agree to her request. Widows were one of the lowest of

people of all the social classes in the Bible. God has commanded throughout the Scripture to care for people in this lowest of social classes, along with orphans and aliens (not people from Mars). Jewish Law included many provision for widows including the right to glean crops from the corners of the field left un-harvested for this purpose. The fact that someone with no social standing could convince a judge to rule in their favor provides evidence just how persistent this particular woman must have been! Jesus didn't mean that God was an unjust judge. Instead he used a rhetorical method of arguing from lesser to greater. Jesus used a very similar method in another parable in Matthew. "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11 NIV). What Jesus meant in Luke's parable was that if the unjust judge was able to be swayed by the persistent pleading of someone from the lowest level of society, how much more would God delight to grant answers to *our* prayers as believers in Jesus and part of the family of God?

A second but very important point arose indirectly from the parable, something that was often repeated in the Bible. God not only called us to be persistent in prayer but also to wait for His timing. Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him." Psalm 27:14 said, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Paul said in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Hebrews 4:16 said, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Patience is essential in prayer, as only God knows the best timing to answer our requests!

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

$11. Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in Jesus."

$12. Construct a kind of "prayer maize" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin with praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

$13. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. Remember what we discussed several weeks ago in the section on Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents,

and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

I bet that some of you are mighty prayer warriors and that your prayer lives came about because of certain circumstances that God allowed. Others may just need a bit of encouraging from time to time about keeping up with the discipline of prayer. Remember, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey. We shouldn't do this out of guilt or obligation, but to deepen our relationship with the Father.

In closing, let me tell you a story about the result of someone like the persistent widow from the Gospel reading being faithful in prayer.

> A young man grew up in a large, Catholic family in the Midwestern US. At around the age of sixteen this man noticed, among other things, that his prayer life was dead. He felt that Mass was just a religious ritual, though he sensed that he earned some merit from God by attending each week. In his early teens, he began dating a woman that motivated him to begin reading the Bible on his own. Over time, he became aware of his need for salvation from his sin, poured out his heart to God in prayer, and asked Jesus to become a much larger part of his life. This young man went off to college and continued his growing devotion to God. After college, he married (a different woman) and began a family. He continued growing in both his faith and professional career.
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> One day he was attending a Bible study at his church and the leader gave him a challenge. The challenge was to think about the most difficult person that he knew who could ever come to a true faith in Jesus. This young family man pondered the question for the only the briefest of moments as he knew immediately for whom he was being challenged to pray – his brother. This particular brother had become very immersed in the world. He owned an airplane and flew around the country for the poorest of reasons, such as to find the best ski hill or the best tasting coffee. This older brother actually went to Mass but his lavish lifestyle didn't encourage any godly attributes.
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> Ten years went by and this man continued to pray for his older brother. One day he received a phone call from him who said that he was reading the Bible and had come to believe in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. His brother said that he had given his life over to the Lord and wanted to tell him about all of the important changes that had been happening in his life.
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> Now, as Paul Harvey used to say, here is the rest of the story. I (Jim) remember well the day that I made that call to my little brother back in 1999. As I moved from small talk onto the description of my spiritual awakening, the other end of the phone line got very quiet.

Evidently, He was crying. My brother was very glad to hear from me that day!

It has been just short of fifteen years since that day I called my brother with that special news of my discovery of Jesus through studying the Bible. My life has never been the same. One of the largest changes has been the deeper relationship with God that I sense through prayer. God placed a calling on my heart to pray for a list of people each day. Although I haven't seen much fruit yet, I pray that God may continue to grant me the strength and encouragement to persist.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Ask God to reveal to you the "Jims" in your life. Who are the lost causes in your life whom only God could change? Write down their names and as God leads pray for them like the persistent widow.

2. We said that prayer and reading of the Bible are the two main ways in which we communicate with God. What are some others ways that God communicates with us?

For Further Study

Do you have a story to share about the power of persistent prayer? You can email me at jim@christiansforchrist.org.

Recommended Readings on Prayer:

"A Journey to Victorious Praying" by Bill Thrasher (Moody, 2003)

"Prayer" by Ole Hallesby (Augsburg, 1994)

"The Way of the Heart" by Henri Nouwen (Ballantine, 1981).

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/100613.cfm

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Exodus 17:8-13 NIV 8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to

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Second Reading

2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2 NIV 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage– with great patience and careful instruction.

Gospel Reading

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Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

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