

Persistent in Prayer

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Gen 18:20-32)

Setting (God investigates Sodom and Gomorah)

²⁰So the LORD said: The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, ²¹that I must go down to see whether or not their actions are as bad as the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out. ²²As the men turned and walked on toward Sodom, Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

Abraham intercedes for the innocent

²³Then Abraham drew near and said: “Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose there were fifty righteous people in the city; would you really sweep away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike! Far be it from you! Should not the judge of all the world do what is just?”²⁶

God’s positive reply

²⁶The LORD replied: If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

Abraham bargains (45 innocent)

²⁷Abraham spoke up again: “See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am only dust and ashes!²⁸ What if there are five less than fifty righteous people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?”

God listens, gives in

I will not destroy it, he answered, if I find forty-five there.

Abraham again bargains (40 innocent)

²⁹But Abraham persisted, saying, “What if only forty are found there?”

God gives in again

He replied: I will refrain from doing it for the sake of the forty.

Abraham bargains for the 3rd time (30 innocent)

³⁰Then he said, “Do not let my Lord be angry if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?” He replied: I will refrain from doing it if I can find thirty there.

God’s gives in again

³¹He replied, “I will forebear doing it if I can find but thirty there.”

Abraham bargains for the 4th time (20 innocent)

³¹Abraham went on, “Since I have thus presumed to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?”

God’s the same response

I will not destroy it, he answered, for the sake of the twenty.



Abraham bargains for the 5th time (10 innocent)

³²But he persisted: “Please, do not let my Lord be angry if I speak up this last time. What if ten are found there?”

God’s answer does not change.

For the sake of the ten, he replied, I will not destroy it.³³

THE FOCUS: The Prayer of Abraham

COMMENTARY

- We must interpret the Reading in relation to the theme of the Gospel Reading which is about prayer. We must see that the Reading is about prayer.
- Here Abraham prays to God as if he is talking to a friend. He bargains. *Makulit. Sinasagad niya ang tawad. Parang binabarat niya ang Diyos (Persistent. Bargains with God).*
- But God does not react negatively to Abraham. If Abraham were talking to a fellow human, that guy would react, “*Ano ka ba (What’s the matter with you)?*”
- Abraham prays not for himself, but for the well-being of the innocent people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He intercedes for them.
- Abraham admits the people have sinned grievously against the Lord (sins of immorality, etc., not indicated in the Reading, but somewhere else).
- All the pleadings and bargainings of Abraham are readily granted by God.
- God does not take offense at Abraham’s pleadings. God does not care if the number is greatly reduced (from 50 to 10). God does not change his stance for the sake of the innocent, proving his divine justice.
- Ten innocent people can save the lives of thousands of sinful people.
- Observe how Abraham is creative in his prayer:
 - First, Abraham admits his littleness (dust and ashes), but is very much concerned, what if the number lacks 5? (or 4 or 3?)[v.27] (*humble*). Second, Abraham

persists [v.29] (*insistent*). Third, Abraham convinces God not to be impatient [v.30] (*persuades*). Fourth, Abraham dares to speak [v.31] (*takes courage*). Fifth, Abraham persists again [v.32] (*does not give up*).

- Observe how God responds to the bargainings of Abraham:

- First, I will not destroy it, if I find 45 (v.28). Second, I will forebear it, for the sake of 40 (v.29). Third, I will forebear it, if I can but find 30 (v.30). Fourth, I will not destroy it, for the sake of the 20 (v.31). Fifth, I will not destroy it, for the sake of 10 (v.32).

REFLECTIONS

One may ask, how come that Abraham is so insistent on saving Sodom and Gomorrah? What is at stake?

We know the answer when we read the larger context of the story. Abraham has relatives (Lot and his wife and 2 daughters) there. Theme of fraternity, solidarity.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8)

**LORD, ON THE DAY I CALLED FOR HELP,
YOU ANSWERED ME.**

SECOND READING (Col 2:12-14)

In passive voice (subject, second person, acted upon)

¹²You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

In active voice (Jesus is the subject)

¹³And even when you were dead [in] transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions;** ¹⁴^aobliterating the **bond** against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed **it from our midst, nailing** it to the cross; ¹⁵despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph by it.*

THE FOCUS: Christ Acts on Us

COMMENTARY

- V.12 indicates what happens when we are baptized: buried and raised.
- In baptism, we share in the death and life of Jesus.
- Sharing is made possible through faith in God.
- V.13 indicates the meaning of death: living in sin (transgressions, uncircumcision of the flesh).
- But Jesus brings life, by forgiving all sins.

- Jesus also removes the bond (something that enslave us), neutralizing it on the cross.

REFLECTIONS

We cannot ignore the power of Christ. We incorporate our lives into Christ through baptism. In baptism, we are forgiven by God.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 11:1-13)

Setting: Jesus praying and disciples asking to be taught how to pray

¹ ^a He was **praying** in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to **pray** just as John taught his disciples.”*

The Lord’s Prayer

² He said to them, “When you **pray**, say: Father, hallowed be your name./ your kingdom come./³ Give us each day our daily bread/⁴ and forgive us our sins/ for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,/ and do not subject us to the final test.”⁷

A parable on persistent prayer

⁵ And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ ⁷and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

The imperatives on prayer and its answer

⁹ ^c And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Assurance that prayers will be answered

¹¹ What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? ¹² Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? ¹³ If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit* to those who ask him?”

COMMENTARY

- The Gospel Reading is about prayer / praying.
- Jesus is seen as praying, and a disciple asks Jesus to teach them pray.
- John the Baptist is remembered once more here. He taught his disciples how to pray. This is the reason why the disciples must also learn how to pray.
- Here we may think Jesus has been remiss of his duty to teach his disciples how to pray.

- We do not know what John's disciples prayed. What we know here is Jesus' prayer. In vv. 2-4, Jesus teaches what to pray. In vv. 5-8, Jesus teaches how to pray.
- One must display a persevering character in order to pray. The pray-er must not be easily discouraged if God does not seem to be listening.
- In the parable, Jesus demonstrates that to pray to God, one must exert tremendous energy; one should defy rejection and discouragements.
- The goal of our prayer is to obtain justice from God. We should not stop praying if that justice has not been given to us, if we really want justice from God.
- Vv.9-10 back up the idea of persistent prayer. Surely, if one is persistent, one will be listened to, and also introduce constancy in prayer. The present imperatives here in Greek indicate the continuity and constancy in prayer.
- Prayer is a non-stop activity. No one should stop praying.
- Vv.11-13 back up the effectivity of prayer. God does not play games with us. He will not give us the wrong things that will bring us to perdition. God will surely give the holy Spirit (the best gift, highest gift) to those who ask him. We better ask for the holy Spirit. We must not ask for the wrong things.

REFLECTIONS

Among the synoptics (Mt, Mk, Lk), Luke is dubbed as the gospel of prayer, because in it, we find instances when Jesus is praying more frequently and teaching how to pray.

Praying is an important activity of a disciple. We prove to be disciples of Jesus if we pray persistently and constantly and if we pray for the right things, especially the holy Spirit.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading presents Abraham as praying. He is talking to God as a friend. He bargains with him. The Second Reading does not explicitly talk about prayer. Our salvation is obtained through the prayerful life of Jesus when he submitted himself to the cross and when God raised him from the dead. This is prayer par excellence, allowing yourself to be controlled by God, not you

controlling God. The Gospel Reading encourages to pray without ceasing.

How to develop your sharing / homily

Relate your experience on prayer. How do you pray? Where do you pray? What do you pray for? What is prayer to you? When do you pray?

The First Reading teaches us in prayer to address God as a friend. When we are concerned about the well-being of our loved ones and friends, the more we pray. Prayer comes as a result of our concern for them. We cannot pray if we do not love anyone even ourselves.

The Second Reading is the product of a prayerful reflection of Christ's mystery. In prayer, we can see in our baptism, how God effects salvation to us. We die and resurrect with him. In Christ, we are forgiven of our transgressions. "Forgive us our sins..."

The Gospel Reading teaches us to be persevering in prayer. We must never give up praying. Praying is a lifestyle of Christians.

We make Jesus' prayer our own. We address our prayer to God our Father.

If we find it hard to pray, we have a problem with our faith and relationship with God and neighbor. Go to your spiritual director. You must have one.

There are many ways to pray. We need discipline to develop and enhance prayer. We must learn from the monks and those whose lives are prayerful.

Those involved in the church must take care that prayer is the priority over anything else.

Our involvement, our attitude, our performance must enhance prayer in our community.

We take care that our presence in the church and in our groups do not disturb the spirit of prayer and devotion among the devotees.

The Holy Mass is the highest form of prayer. We join Jesus in offering himself to the Father.

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Today is Fil-Mission Sunday. Do you know any Filipino Missionary abroad? Let us pray for them.

2. What are the ways we are able to promote Missionary awareness in our parishes and communities?

3. Our OFW's can also become new missionaries. How? (HM)