

30th Sunday in Ordinary — October 27, 2019

Remaining persistent in prayer is certainly a theme we have found in these past few weeks and again today..... trusting 'He will hear us' Is that not the most difficult part of prayer waiting and Trusting ! Wondering as Habakkuk 3 weeks ago "How long O LordHow Long must I wait?"

It appears to be like a Mantra in the Readings these past few weeks. All of this is a beautiful set-up for the Gospel. A story of what God observes in prayer. It is not necessary to let God know how good we are He really does know because He sees our Hearts.

Once again, it would be very easy to hear the Gospel and say — what a nice and true story — I agree with Jesus. I totally agree with what He is saying and that's it !!! What a treasure we would miss if that is all we get out of the teaching ! Let's look carefully at the teachingwhat is He inviting me to hear in this powerful event.

The Pharisees were lay people who dedicated themselves to trying to keep God's Law as perfectly and as scrupulously as they possibly could. St. Paul was a Pharisee, and remained a Pharisee all of his life. The impression many people have is that Pharisees were bad people, and many would even add Jesus didn't like the Pharisees not true ! Jesus had some followers from among the Pharisee Party. The Pharisees performed spiritual practices over and above what the Law demanded, (Torah— 613 Precepts) and they tended to look down on anyone who failed to live up to their standards. The prayer we hear in today's Gospel would be the rather typical prayer of most Pharisees.... AND most probably what the Pharisee said about himself was true.

Now, there is a Publican this was the the original term used in the text. (A Publican in Ireland is one who owns a place where alcoholic beverages are provided in a climate of hospitality, and a lot of stuff is processed in the course of conversation A PUB) In Jesus' time, a Publican was one who worked for the Government a Public Servant. This man was Jewish, and he worked for the Government, the Roman Government who ruled Israel. The Jews, not surprisingly, hated this occupation of their country by a foreign power. Rome also required that taxes be sent annually to Rome.

This Publican made his living as a tax collector. Such individuals were seen as traitors to their own people, and they were thieves as well. (Some people still think that is true ! Won't stumble in there) The tax collector collected what would have been the Roman tax, and then he added to this tax an additional tax which was his salary. Quite often the Publicans paid themselves well by collecting enough money for a relatively comfortable life style. Was it against the Law ? Perhaps not as far as Rome was concernedas for the people ?

So, let's put it into everyday parlance or everyday practice !

I have a friend who had a fundamental belief that divorce is wrong in every case. Period ! It's the law, it is the promise you make !!! She was of the opinion that people who got a divorce, simply didn't try hard enough, and they didn't love enough. After 28 years of marriage (they had celebrated their 25 Anniversary, renewal of vows, and large celebration) she found herself in the throes of a contentious, painful, and difficult divorce. She is now divorced, and is experiencing a much more fruitful life. She now has a much greater compassion for the struggles of friends, and the difficulties that are so often hidden in one's life. She likes to say now "You just never know what the other person is going through." Was she wrong to begin with ? Maybe Maybe not ! Did she have something valuable to learn ? You Betcha !

I have an additional story ! Many years ago a couple came to me for counseling, it has really happened a number of times since. It turns out in the session that the husband is refusing to forgive his wife for something she has done. It is not necessarily 'infidelity' as we know it, but an issue about truth. An issue where she hasn't told him the full truth, or kept something hidden from him. We spoke about the reality, and the importance of spouses needing to develop a capacity to forgive one another over the period of their journey. As a way of extending the conversation, I said to him : "I am sure she has had to forgive you for some things you did in the course of your marriage." A Pause !!! How very sad ! He said, rather proudly : "I have never done anything that she would have needed to forgive me for."

Few things can end a conversation so rapidly ! There is not much to say ! Over the next number of weeks, we attempted to address the same issue but there is no change in the attitude. Simply a sense of emboldening his perspective through the addition of other issues ! Meanwhile, he tells me he doesn't want a divorce !! Does it help you in understanding this parable ? Was God going to commend him for such righteousness ?

Our Study Book for this week's Small Group process provides us with a powerful insight. I am so sorry you all don't have a text to follow and read this. Here is what Linda Rooney says : " As we reflect on Step Six, we let go of the nets of preconceived notions, past experiences, and current events in order to learn how to judge by 'Kingdom Standards'. We surrender our quick judgements as we intentionally try to see the good in ourselves or others. Isn't this what Jesus showed us as he bypassed the external circumstances of those He met, looking instead into their hearts ? He demonstrated what God does when God looks at us. This is what he tried to teach the disciples who walked with him— that God, who is good, is present in all people and all situations if we only have eyes to see. It is we who need to see rightly. We can all find what is wrong, but can we see the good." We will continue this theme with next week's Gospel which has very similar shades of this Gospel, if you wish to look ahead!

—Fr. Gerry Hurley