

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on July 9, 2006
Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year B

How many of you have prayed for something? How many of you got what you prayed for? How many didn't get what you prayed for? Those of you who didn't get what you prayed for are not alone. St. Paul had the same experience, as we hear in today's second reading.

Paul has been alienated from the Corinthians – we're not sure why – but it has implications for his authority. To break the stalemate, he begins speaking very personally. He tells them about an extraordinary experience in prayer. While he is delighting in all of this on the one hand, on the other hand something is going wrong. It may be sickness, a chronic condition, perhaps a speech impediment, maybe even depression. He doesn't say exactly what it is, but it is preventing him from preaching the Gospel. He prays three times that the Lord would take this away from him. The first time there is no answer – and again no answer – and then the answer is “No”.

But there's more. “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” Christ did not just say “No”. He saw it as an opportunity, an opportunity for “My grace, My power” to be manifested in another way.

In the Gospel, we see the same thing. The townsfolk in Nazareth like what Jesus is about, but then – “Well, He's just one of us – we're all the same, Him and us.” Now He offends them – “Who does He think He is?” – and Jesus cannot do any good deeds there except to heal a few who are sick, those who are weak and vulnerable. Christ has a penchant, a fondness for the weak and vulnerable. They represent who all of us really are – weak people, vulnerable to all kinds of debilitation, but available to Christ's saving power.

Often priests and other professional ministers and ordinary Catholics will comment – with attitude – about the folks who come to church on Ash Wednesday who never come otherwise. I have another opinion these days. I think they find us, as a community, easier to identify with when we are acknowledging our weaknesses, rather than when we are proclaiming our strengths. Christ can do remarkable things in us when we allow our weakness to be occasion for His grace to do its work in us.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written in the year 54. Paul's death occurred sometime between years 60 and 64. He had six to ten more years to preach. The “No” didn't slow him down. It was a time for the grace of Christ to work in another way. This is heartwarming for a weakened Church and encouraging for weak Catholics.

In the Eucharist, Christ comes at the weakest point of His life, His passion and death, to share with us the power of His Resurrection and the strength of His new life. As we come to the Eucharist today, let's approach Him with our weakness and vulnerability, confident that His power is made perfect in our weakness.