

Prayer Changes Us

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

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Most of us have probably had the experience of praying really hard for something and not getting it. This can be a frustrating experience after which we feel drained and mentally exhausted: 'Why didn't God give me what I asked for? Were all those prayers for nothing? Maybe I was tricked!'

In today's Gospel parable, we come across a widow who was in a similar situation. For a long time, she went to the local judge asking him for a just decision, but never got it. She must have been very frustrated; she wanted justice but wasn't getting it. Instead of letting her frustration stop her, however, the widow kept at it, so much so that she wanted to punch the judge! Finally, we are told towards the end of the parable that she got the judge to render her a just decision. The point of the parable is that her greatest strength was that she was persistent. She didn't let her frustrations prevent her from continuing to seek what she was looking for.

This parable is ultimately a lesson about prayer. As the Gospel started, "Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary." There can be many frustrations, distractions, and setbacks in prayer; many times when we are tempted to give up. Maybe we don't really even have a prayer life in the first place. Whether we have one yet or not, Jesus teaches us that prayer is going to require persistence.

One of the reasons why so many people aren't persistent in prayer and give up on it so quickly is because they are trying to change God's mind: 'If only I would say a certain number of prayers, go to so many

masses, be on my best behavior, or pray the right words enough times, God would have to listen to me and grant my request.' But that is not prayer and that seldom works. Prayer is not about changing God, as if we could even do that! God is already good, holy, and perfect. We are the problem! As the Franciscan priest Fr. Richard Rohr nicely summarizes, "Prayer is about changing you, not about changing God." (*The Naked Now*, 102) There is a huge difference.

We are to be persistent in prayer- to pray always without becoming weary- because when we stick with it over the long run, prayer starts to change us. Spending time in prayer can reveal things about ourselves that we might not want to face or spend so much time avoiding. In the silence, in a non-threatening way, God can help us deal with our shadows, issues, needs, and situations. God will walk us step by step through everything if we allow him and don't quit out of frustration when times get tough. We are to pray always without becoming weary. Or, as St. Paul encouraged his listeners in his letter to *Timothy* today, to "be persistent, whether it is convenient or inconvenient."

Persistence in prayer has the ability to really change us.

Do I see prayer as me trying to change God?

If so, we should stop because that is not prayer. May we be so persistent that we allow our prayer to change us, for as St. John Henry Newman, one of the newest saints of the church as of last weekend, said "to live is to change. And to be perfect is to have changed often."