

29th Sunday C (Luke 18:1-8)

“Jesus told his disciples a parable on the necessity of praying always and not losing heart.” Do you ever wonder why people pray? Sometimes it doesn’t seem to help. At other times, it does. Most of us have prayed for some sick people. Some of them have recovered from their illness and been restored to active and healthy lives. But others of them have stayed sick, gotten worse, and eventually died. We pray for all kinds of things with doubtful results, world peace, for example. Yet we continue to see countless conflicts, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Palestine, and in other parts of the world. I’ve seen little evidence that my prayers have been effective in bringing greater peace to the world.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus prayed? After all, he was Son of God, and why should he pray? Yet, over and over again, he went apart to lonely places and to remote mountains to pray by himself. He spoke of it as a necessity. Praying was not so much something he ought to do as something he had to do. It was either that or be strongly tempted to give up. Jesus spoke out of personal experience when he told his disciples the parable of “praying always and not losing heart.” With him it was either prayer or despair. Jesus prayed for at least two reasons, to grow in a deeper awareness of his own identity, his relationship with his heavenly Father, his own self-awareness, a process of discovering and deepening his mission. Jesus prayed also to make some sense of the absurdities and sinfulness in the world, the violence and hatred of people toward one another, the lust for power and control. These are also some good reasons for us to pray as well, and to pray always, to have an attitude of prayer.

Many definitions of prayer are described essentially in terms of personal activity, on the initiative of the one attempting to pray. This is a misconception. It creates the conviction that the fruitfulness and growth of personal prayer is necessarily related to personal effort and responsibility. A far better way to describe personal prayer is to see God as the initiator, the center, and starting point of prayer. The initiative is in the loving action of God. In this process with God as the initiator, God leads us to a deeper knowledge of ourselves. God’s light illuminates us, revealing new and startling dimensions of our personality to us. Divine light enhances self-awareness and deepens self-acceptance and self-esteem. Personal truth is communicated in such a way that one sees more clearly and accepts more deeply the mysterious reality of ourselves in all its weaknesses and strengths.

Prayer is a gift from our loving God. Prayer helps us to become more aware of the various creative ways that God is already present and active in our lives. It consists not so much in what we do, but in how much we allow God to do, to act in and through us, to “gift” us. In short, prayer is an awareness of God’s constant and loving presence and action in our lives. It is a profound call and personal invitation to growth and fidelity, to transformation and freedom, to become a new creation, a new person in God. It involves giving God the power to possess us while allowing ourselves the freedom to enter more generously into the loving, unconditional embrace of the God who loves us passionately. And for this we give thanks.

Al Grosskopf, SJ.