



Twenty Ninth Sunday Ordinary Time

Exodus 17: 8-13 2 Timothy 3: 14-4: 2 Luke 18: 1-8

The section from the letter to Timothy provides a framework for today's reflection on prayer.

We are encouraged to be faithful to what we have learned. Our trust is to be based from learning from authentic voices. This is not easy as there are so many voices competing to be heard. This is where Scripture and Tradition come into play. Our Scriptures particularly the Gospels and the writings of the New Testament are for our formation. The Scriptures provide a school of holiness. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council are still the yardstick by which other teachings are measured. You will often hear that such a point of theology or discipline is in accord with Vatican II or some arguing that something is not in the spirit of Vatican II. This tells us that we need to be able to test ideas in the light of the Council.

When the Pope and Bishops write documents they too, must test what they say against the Scriptures and Tradition.

The story from Exodus and the story from Luke show what the community understood about some elements of prayer.

The context of the story is a battle with an indigenous people of the Sinai peninsula who challenged Moses and the Israelites as they attempted to cross their lands. The two sides met at Rephidim a place which means the shrinking of the arms. Moses told Joshua to select a few men to face the challenge. Meanwhile Moses climbed to the top of the hill with two companions. Moses stood with his hands extended and while he prayed Joshua did well. If his arms slumped the tide of battle turned. To keep Moses' arms high Aaron and Hur got him to sit on a rock and they held up his hands. Joshua won the battle.

We could easily read this story in a simplistic almost magical way. For the Jews the correct posture for prayer was to stand. We read in John's Gospel that Mary stood by the cross, this was to indicate that Mary was at prayer, not falling down in grief as one who had no hope.

Moses could not persevere in prayer by himself. He needed the support, in this case, literally, of the community. So in this story we see prayer as a

community action, some are needed to take an active role in bringing about a need for all, for example aid workers, and those people know they need the support of the others "at home". This kind of prayer support we see exemplified in the life of Therese of Lisieux, although she was a French Carmelite who never left her convent she was named as patron of the missions.

In the story from Luke we have a battle of a different sort; a widow who was up against an official who could not be reasoned with on the grounds of religion, or ethics. She had one weapon, persistence. In the end the official gave in because he was fed up. The prayer of the widow appeared to be hopeless. Her cry for justice was heard but not heeded.

One lesson to learn from this story is that prayer is not to be half-hearted. Our needs have to be known and sometimes the first listener has to be ourselves. We pray for intentions without really thinking about what it is we seek. Listen to our parish petitions on Sunday. We pray for peace in some part of the world. What do we really want?

Are we praying that God will intervene and we will be able to go back to being less disturbed by the news on Television. If we pray for peace what specifically are we seeking and how are we going about bringing this peace about? Remember there are many roles involved in community prayer.

What are my responsibilities when I pray?

Patricia Stevenson rsj.