



TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Cycle C

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

GATHERING

(An unlit candle, an open bible, a colorful setting of fall leaves and a staff-like long stick are arranged on the table in the gathering place.)

We listen this week to powerful stories of endurance and persistence. We travel back in time to the days of the Israelites defending their promised land from invading tribes. We are then moved forward right to the present time by Paul's words, "[R]emain faithful to all you have learned and believed!" Last week we were challenged to look more deeply at one of our own experiences of God and life. Members share a time when they looked for and found the *more* in a person or experience this past week. *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit and members dwell silently for some time in God's presence. After some minutes the leader and several members pray as follows. To each prayer members respond, "Lord, help us to keep our arms raised to you." The leader picks up the staff-stick to do the first prayer. The stick is then passed to other members who offer the intentions that follow.)

- Leader: At those times when life seems too demanding with cares and responsibilities, we pray...
- I: At those times when we struggle with decision making in our daily living, we pray...
- II: At those times when we feel sorrow and pain over a loved one, we pray...
- III: At those times when we are challenged with new growth directions, we pray...
- IV: At those times when forgiveness, not judgment, is called for, we pray...

Focus Question

Share one way you treasure the gift of time.

Commentary

Do you have the time? What time is it? Where has the time gone? It's all about time and persevering through time!

The Israelites were being invaded by the Amalekite tribe from the south, and Moses saw a battle coming. But when he directed Joshua to engage them in battle, he was confident of victory because it would be there "with the staff of God in my hand" (the same staff that was used to save them from the hands of Pharaoh's armies). What Moses did not know, was just how long that battle would take and how weary his arms would get.

Like Moses, we, too, are often called to do battle against negative forces in our life as they try to bring us down. Sometimes we find our strength and stamina weakening. What do we do for help? Moses was fortunate to have Aaron and Hur by his side. As time went on and Moses' arms grew weary, he saw the victory slipping away. Aaron and Hur found a place for him to rest. Together they held up his arms. The staff of God stayed raised so the victory would be theirs. His hands remained "steady till sunset" and the battle was done.

We are not so unlike the Israelites of old, trying to make a life in this earthly desert. We are frequently engaged in battles over choices between good and evil. We ourselves may be fortunate to have our own small church community, or loved ones to hold up our arms in support and prayer when life gets difficult, and seemingly insurmountable challenges come our way. But maybe *we* also need to *be* that strength for someone else. Spending time in prayer and reflection and sharing our concerns within the small Christian community is a ready-made opportunity, not only to receive support, but also to be the support others need. And, yes, it takes time.

"How much time?" we might ask. In the gospel, Jesus tells us that we need to pray "without becoming weary". In his story about the widow who pesters the judge for a just decision, we hear the judge taking "a long time" until he comes to a just decision on her behalf. She hangs in there. She doesn't give up. It is her perseverance that pays off. Often, Jesus leaves his disciples in a quandry at the end of a parable, but here he is very specific in answering the question, "[W]ill God be slow to answer them?" Not only will God secure the rights of his chosen ones, he says, but God "will see to it that justice is done for them *speedily*." But God's time is not always our time. We have to persevere and hold on to hope.

The leaves are falling from the trees. The natural world seems to be losing life, but we know this time of dormancy is not an idle time. The earth is being re-energized to create new life for the spring. Our prayer may not seem fruitful in our time frame, but God knows when to "secure the rights of his chosen ones." We need to keep our arms raised, be persistent, and *make time* for prayer.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Share a story about a time you witnessed a victory for someone as a result of the support of a group.
- ◆ Who in your experience has embodied perseverance in prayer for a just cause?
- ◆ What cause might we as a group undertake to pray or work for with perseverance?

- ◆ What inconvenient truth have you had to deal with at some time in your home or business?
- ◆ The “staff of God” is Moses’ totem. What might you use as a prayer-time totem?
- ◆ How much time have you made for prayer in this past month?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes for prayer some day this week. Come to the prayer with three or four intentions. Lift up your hands for several minutes for each intention. Rest quietly for a couple of minutes in between intentions.
- ◆ Arrange to have a judge from your diocesan marriage tribunal invited to your parish to speak about the annulment process and how he/she seeks to find justice for petitioners in accord with justice toward God.
- ◆ See how you can be an advocate to address the large issues underlying poverty in our country and around the world. Investigate the work of RESULTS, a non-profit grassroots advocacy association, committed to creating the political will to end hunger and the worst aspects of poverty. Check it out online at www.results.org. Click on Activist Toolkit to see the range of actions available to you.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

*(The leader invites the community to a time of silent prayer. After some minutes, the leader takes up the stick and breaks off a piece and prays, “**May I remain faithful to the Lord and persistent in prayer.**” Each member follows, doing and praying the same. An selection of instrumental music plays as members hold their stick and extend their arms in prayer. When the music is complete, the session concludes with the praying of the Lord’s Prayer and the exchange of a sign of peace. Members take the piece of stick with them as a reminder to devote time to prayer in this coming week.)*

(Special Note: Before members depart, the leader asks that each bring with her/him some personal or family prayer book for next week.