

30th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C" *Going home justified.*
October 26-27, 2013/ 7:00 pm, 8:00a, 10:00a, 5:00 pm
Readings: Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

"The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens." These words are from the Book of Sirach, written 200 years before Christ. The author reveals that the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds and does not rest until it reaches its goal. It is a great study in persistence. Ben Sira was a wise family man, given to study and writing. He taught, read widely, and enjoyed a sterling reputation. People trusted his advice, and he offered it freely. Much of the wisdom was communicated by his grandson, to whom was entrusted the translation of the book in its present form.

The clouds about which Sirach wrote were more than atmospheric clouds; it referred to the attendants at God's throne. The Book of Lamentations, written several centuries before Sirach, spoke of a veiled God to whom the people reached out towards heaven. "You wrapped yourself in a cloud which prayer could not pierce,"¹ lamented the writer.

So, the idea of a hidden God was very well known then, and it is an aspect of prayer with which we struggle to this day. God can often seem hidden, veiled. Psalm 104 speaks beautifully of the God of creation who makes the clouds His chariot, traveling on the wings of the wind. God dwells far above the visible clouds. Centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote perhaps his most famous hymn, "*Adoro te devote latens deitas*," "Devotedly we adore you, hidden God."² Clearly in this sense the phrase is a reference to the presence of Jesus Christ veiled in the Holy Eucharist.

¹ Lamentations 3:44

² A hymn St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274AD) composed in honor of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament at the request of Pope Urban IV at the time of the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 AD.

While many in Old Testament times attributed the hiddenness to an angry God, many people today feel the same way about God's hiddenness, even if they do not attribute it to God's anger. Our culture has squeezed God out of our public discourse; so many today simply approach God as hidden from their every day lives. They just want to feel His presence more in their lives.

How are we to do that? Certainly we could read books, for many of them can provide valuable resources for a more effective prayer life. But they are not a substitute. Simply put, prayer itself can be a battle. The Catechism even has a section entitled "The Battle of Prayer." "Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort."³

Still, many become *discouraged* because they forget that prayer comes from the Holy Spirit and not only due to our own effort. If we think that we can earn spiritual consolation by persistent efforts at prayer, we will be very disappointed. We become distracted, we experience spiritual dryness and disappointment. But our lack of feeling consolation in prayer is not a reason to stop praying. Our prayers do count, they do pierce the clouds, even if we lack confirmation of this.

Prayer cannot be measured based on whether or not we hear the answer we desire, or according to our time frame. Christian prayer is cooperation with God's providence, his plan of love for mankind.⁴ He prays in us and with us; God is present in our very act of praying, and more than all else, we receive the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us by grace.

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2725.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2738.

Blessed John Henry Newman, the great 19th century cleric and writer once remarked, “Before the flame of religion in the heart is purified and strengthened by long practice and experience, it will flare about and flicker, and at times even seem to go out.”⁵ These are precisely the times when we mustn’t give up.

Jesus will never stop interceding on our behalf with the Father. The tax collector understood how this works much better than did the self-righteous Pharisee in today’s Gospel. He prayed in humility, never for a moment trusting in his own righteousness, as if it was something about which he could boast.

Minneapolis Church story... a man hobbles in, making lots of noise with his cane, shabbily dressed, and heading right for the front row. I watched as he walked, wondering what he would do next...feebly reached into his overcoat....I thought to myself- “He is going to take a drink right in Church!”

Instead, he simply reached down to reveal a tattered old prayer book, held together by rubber bands, lest all the pages fall out. He opened it ever so carefully and began to pray.

Convicted on the spot by my own self-righteousness, there was little doubt in my mind who left the Church justified that day and who would not.

⁵ John Henry Newman, “Profession without Hypocrisy,” from Plain and Parochial sermons, Sermon #11