

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

Let's be honest, our first reading today is a little repetitive. Maybe you found yourself getting a little restless listening to the back-and-forth negotiations between God and Abraham over whether or not to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. I read that archeologists think they may have discovered the site of these two ancient cities near the Dead Sea in what is now the country of Jordan. It does appear that this area may have been totally incinerated millennia ago. Certainly that would have been a shocking event and word of that would have spread throughout the region.

Whatever the exact historical details of this event may have been, this account from the book of Genesis is intended to teach us some theological truths about God and about our relationship with Him. First, we can and should bring our needs to the Lord in prayer, what is known as intercessory prayer, or prayers of petition. We find Abraham doing that, over and over, in this reading, asking God if He

would still destroy those cities if he found even just 10 righteous people in them. Second, God is just, and that justice means not just punishment of the wicked but also mercy for the innocent. Third, if there is a conflict between justice and mercy, God chooses mercy.

However, there have been countless instances throughout human history of natural and man-made disasters, and it seems that both those who are innocent suffer the same as though who are “wicked” or evil. It can seem so arbitrary and even unfair. But it can only make any sense in light of eternity. Our faith reminds us that this life is not all there is. If it were, these things would truly be arbitrary, and the question of fairness would not really even apply. Our faith reminds us that God’s justice and His mercy will be brought to fulfillment in the next life.

And our Gospel reading also holds a clue to understanding this reading from Genesis. Here we hear Luke’s version of the Our Father; the version that we are more used to is the one from the

Gospel of Matthew. Matthew's version of course is a little longer, a little fuller. As with Abraham's pleading with God in our first reading, this version of the Our Father is a prayer of petition: asking for our daily bread, for forgiveness, for the grace to forgive others, and so on.

But then Jesus also adds a little story about a man who goes to a friend asking for three loaves of bread. And he goes at midnight! That's a little bold! In this story, Jesus says that, even if the friend says to leave him alone and go away because it's midnight and everyone is already in bed, he will eventually give in and give him what he wants if the man persists in asking, if for no other reason than to make him go away. What Jesus is trying to teach us here is the importance of perseverance in prayer. Just as Abraham persevered in asking God for mercy for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jesus urges us to do the same. This is not because doing so will somehow change God's mind, as if He at first does not want

to help us. Remember, as I said in my homily last week, God is not like a much bigger version of us with all of our frustrations and weaknesses, who might get tired of us or find our petitions and prayers kind of annoying or inconvenient. Rather, Jesus draws a contrast between God and man: a human being might give in to someone's persistent requests for help just to make them go away, but God will respond out of love for us. Our perseverance in prayer does not change God or somehow make him a better version of Himself (that's not possible); our perseverance in prayer rather changes us. It increases our faith and our hope in God.

And God also desires to give us something even greater than what we might ask for. We might limit ourselves to asking God for material things or some kind of physical well-being, and so on. There is of course nothing wrong with this. God wants us to bring all our needs to Him, great and small. But He also wants us to be bold in asking Him for what we truly need, that is, our spiritual

needs, and to not limit ourselves to the purely material or physical. Again, those things will eventually pass away. He wants us to desire and ask for that which will last for all eternity. He wants us to ask for an increase in grace, an increase in virtue, an increase in faith, hope, and charity, so that we might grow closer to Him. This will transform not our bodies but our souls. It will not feed us physically but rather spiritually.

Sometimes we might think that God has not heard us or answered our prayers. Sometimes people say things like, “Our prayers worked!”, if they asked for something and then got it. But other times, we might pray and pray for something, and not only do we not get what we asked for, nothing seems to change, and it seems that God is absent or not paying attention to us. In these situations, I would venture to say that a couple things are going on here: one, God wants us to persevere in our prayer, because, again, this can increase our faith and hope, and it will change us for the better. And

two, while He may not give us the exact thing we ask for and in the time that we want it, He does have something even better in store for us. Just as Jesus says in today's Gospel: "What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg?" We can trust that God is not going to disappoint us, but rather that He will give us something even greater than we can imagine.

If a mother or father always gave their children whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted it, those children would end up spoiled and would be difficult people to be around and never satisfied with anything. Or conversely, if the mother or father always ignored their children and never gave them anything, there would no doubt be a total breakdown in the parent-child bond. When we bring our wants and needs to God, He won't give us everything we want because doing so would not be for our ultimate good. But He will continue to provide for us – and again, in ways that we often

cannot imagine. He will respond to us in His time, and we can be sure that He will give us what is best for us, what we truly need. And our perseverance in prayer will increase and strengthen the bond between us and our Heavenly Father.

Let's not hesitate to go to Him, to knock on His door, to seek Him. He will surely answer us and give us His life and His love – the greatest of gifts.

- **July 27, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**