The “Power” of Prayer

Exodus 17:8-13
Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8
2 Timothy
Luke 18:1-8

“But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” That’s a pretty rough question isn’t it? It’s a question we probably ask ourselves while watching the news or reading the paper. It is also a question that we must take a step back from and ask ourselves honestly as well. If Jesus were to come back on the clouds today, what kind of faith would he find within us? What sort of faith does he mean? Does he mean perfect faith or does he mean faith in action? Does he mean an absolute and sure faith or might he mean any faith, as in: even a little will suffice? I don’t know! Today however, our readings give us some very important insights to help us answer that question. Our readings are about perseverance and not growing weary in our faith which relies on our prayers to bolster, reinforce and energize. In other words, the key to answering the question about our faith lies in our ability to constantly “charge” our faith through regular prayer that is done with persistence, patience and purpose. Prayer like this can certainly seem like a struggle for us in the course of busy lives but these readings today show us that we aren’t the only ones who struggle in this way. We do and will get weary, there is no way around it, but if we challenge our notions of what it means to pray then maybe we can be successful and have a faith that is constantly energized and true.

Let me try to illustrate my point. I travel quite a bit for work and one of the things that I get concerned about is my cell phone battery running out, almost to the point of paranoia. I try to make sure that the phone is charged fully before getting on planes because I know that my phone is my music source, game source and the thing that makes the flights seem shorter. What I realized last week as I was travelling all over the place is that there is a correlation here. A lot of planes don’t have charging capabilities and the more we do with our phones
the more battery it uses and the more apps we have open, either actively or in the background, the faster the phone loses its charge. If the phone represents us and the apps represent all of the things that we have going on in our lives then we can see how necessary it is to manage our “apps” or find time to plug ourselves in to receive the spiritual energy that is sucked from us in the course of our lives. The ideal situation is to be constantly plugged in or at least to never be too far from a means to charge.

My point here is that Jesus is asking us to pray constantly without growing weary and the reality is that this seems impossible. How many of us can constantly walk around using our rosaries or stop for extended periods of formal prayer? I’d love to and I’m sure many of you would too, but it is not necessarily possible for most of us at this time in our lives to do so. But if we change the way we view prayer we can find ways to avoid becoming weary or we can take a play out of the Book of Exodus and maybe find creative and effective ways to overcome our weariness in order to do exactly what Jesus is challenging us with today: “to pray always without becoming weary”. St. Thérèsa of Lisieux, the Little Flower, realized this at a very young age and built her spiritual life around making the little things and tasks in her life into a prayer. She is the model of the persistence in action that is represented by the woman in our Gospel today. St. Thérèsa offered all she did as a constant, on-going prayer, seeing the divine in the mundane and her struggles in life as a link to the suffering of Christ.

Do you see the Divine in the dishes you’re washing? Probably not. But what if you viewed the task of doing dishes as an act of charity toward your spouse or an act of penance (which is probably easier to do)? Maybe, in this “little way”, we can see it a little more clearly as an act of prayer. Or how about viewing mowing the lawn as an opportunity to give thanks for the gift of God’s creation as we act as a steward of it? These are just a few examples and I’m sure you can think of other tasks that can be viewed as prayer if we change our outlook. The key to all of this though, is to realize that it takes active participation, or at least a certain level of active acknowledgement, that what you are doing, you are doing for some greater good as an offering to God and that in itself is prayer. Maybe this is a way of staying plugged-in if you will to the sources
of spiritual energy that prevent us from losing power from the events and tasks in our lives that seem like a constant drain.

Like many things in life though this takes practice and an active will. I learned this from people like Fr. Charlie and Fr. Rod and other spiritual directors that I’ve met who have tried to help me with my prayer life. I’m not going to lie, I still struggle at times to see traffic or an overflowing toilet as an opportunity to commune with God, but with the proper orientation (again, probably penance) even these can help manage our spiritual battery during occasions that are particularly taxing.

We will still grow weary, however. Moses didn’t let his arms being tired keep him from his commitment to God. Instead, he shows us that with a little creativity, and help from our friends and family, we can overcome our weariness without giving up on our spiritual duties to pray. Maybe it’s an Our Father while washing our hands (it’s more thorough than saying the ABC’s) or maybe it’s saying Grace before meals, or offering a Hail Mary on your way to the parking lot?

There is certainly no shortage of things to pray for these days. From natural disasters like the destruction in Haiti and the flooding in the Carolinas to manmade disasters like genocide and civil war and even in our own country as we stand on the doorstep of a presidential election, we as a Church have an obligation to pray for needs of the world in addition to our own needs. We must be agents of the Gospel to the world in order to increase faith in God here on earth. This may sound idealistic or too overwhelming for us to accomplish but the key is to find little and creative ways to pray in addition to our formalized prayer, for all the intentions of the world and the Church, constantly, lest we grow weary in our faith. This is the challenge Jesus puts forth to us today. The task is not impossible but it certainly is not a passive endeavor. We must be persistent but patient as we try to make prayer more constant in our lives. This is how our faith will be strengthened so that we can answer, in a positive way, Jesus’ question of faith on earth. Likewise, it is in this way that we will continue to energize our faith so that we can energize the faith of others’ lives, through the “power” of prayer.