

Sunday's Word

Prayers are answered in God's time

July 28, 2013

**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME****Gen 18:20-32**

Abraham bargains with God

Ps 138:1-3, 6-8

When I called, you answered

Col 2:12-14

Buried and raised in baptism

Lk 11:1-13

Give us this day our daily bread

[http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/
072813.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072813.cfm)**REV. ROBERT
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reacts in anger at mistreatment of the poor (cf. Ex 22:21-23; Is 5:7). Sodom and Gomorrah became types of sinful cities in biblical literature. Is 1:9-10; 3:9 sees their sin as lack of social justice, Ez 16:46-51, as disregard for the poor, and Jer 23:14, as general immorality. In the Genesis story, the sin is violation of the sacred duty of hospitality by the threatened rape of Lot's guests.

But actually the reading is not even about Sodom's injustice and hospitality. It is about Abraham's untiring petition in their name.

The event takes the form of bargaining, a popular method of commercial dealing in Near Eastern societies. While bargaining is not always the best form of prayer, since sometimes we find ourselves dictating to God what should be done, today's story does illustrate Abraham's persistence in a dramatic fashion. And in the liturgy, as we work our way through to the conclusion, we are allowed to participate in that persistence. Our own impatience, when he will not let the matter be dropped, is part of the lesson.

The Gospel reading from Luke combines a few passages of similar character.



The first part is Luke's somewhat abbreviated version of the Lord's Prayer. The disciples have asked Jesus' advice about praying. The "Our Father" is the result.

But he doesn't stop there. He follows it up with a parable and a set of sayings. If you notice, it would seem that most of this might well be a commentary on the Lord's Prayer.

The parable concerns a scenario in which one goes to a friend in the middle of the night and requests three loaves of

bread, since an unexpected guest has arrived and the pantry is empty. Even if met with reluctance, the friend will respond to persistent requests. Note the themes of persistence, bread and hospitality — here doubly present, since the beseeching visitor himself has a guest.

The sayings invoke the listeners' experience as parents. This is not a bad comparison for many aspects of faith life. After all, parents tend to show an unselfish caring, one that is also unbegrudging and unconditional. God's love certainly matches our own, at least, and certainly goes far beyond it.

The emphasis has now shifted from the quality of persistence to the need for prayer of petition. Here it is not so much a matter of pressing on, but rather that of a parent's inclination to concede anything is needed upon request.

Perhaps the motive behind all this assurance is simply that we do not always experience prompt results from our prayers. As it is now, it was then as well. An underlying lesson is that the answer to our prayers is given in God's time, and in God's own way.

For reflection: When we pray the Lord's Prayer, what is it we focus on?

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Note: Father Beck's "Sunday's Word" for Aug. 4 & Aug. 11 will be found on the Witness web site.