

**29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C – June 10, 2013**

Harriet Burke

Reflections on **Exodus 17:8-13, 2 Timothy 3:14 -4:2, Luke 28:1-8**

**T**oday we have been given two very interesting people to consider as role models for prayer – in their perseverance and in praying always.

The first role model is Moses, held up as a man of faith and a prayer figure while the Israelites were in battle with the Amalekites. The Amalekites were made up of several tribes who banded together to be the enemy of Israel. During the battle, as long as Moses kept his arms raised in prayer, the Israelites were successful. So the battle that Joshua was waging in the valley for the Israelites depended on Moses' endurance—his ability to keep his arms raised in prayer. It makes God sound like a protector, defender, or even warrior who chooses sides.

One of the things that touched me in this reading is Aaron and Hur's assistance to Moses. As the battle waged, the two friends climbed to the top of the hill to help hold up Moses' arms so he could continue in his prayer mode. It is an impressive image for *community* – helping one another communicate with God.

Probably because I am a widow, my ears always perk up when I hear a widow story. This woman today is sometimes called the relentless or persistent widow.

The story makes it easy for us to picture this woman as a nagger, maybe someone a bit off, who won't back away on *what* she perceives to be a justice issue. But let's consider her in another light this evening.

Can we rather see her as a person of maturity? Jesus holds her up as a model not just of persistence but also an example of "praying always." Where did she get her strength to keep asking the judge to protect her—and to listen to her and her plight?

Just because she was considered someone on the fringe did not mean she didn't know God. In the reading from Second Timothy we hear we are "to be faithful to all that we learned and believed" and also the reminder that "we know who our teachers are."

Did our widow today fall into this category? Was she formed in sacred scripture? Was she a person of prayer, a person who prayed always?

I think it's very possible. Of course she had her setbacks and must have felt powerless at times—her husband had died and apparently she had no son to support her. That could mean she was destitute. But rather than being powerless, this person with no name seems full of strength. She tells the judge she has been violated and needs protection and seeks justice. To me, there is an amazing holiness about her. That strength and holiness allows her to stand up as an equal to a corrupt man who is used to wielding power and control.

Remember – she is lifted up for us as a role model for praying always.

So what does that mean, how do we do that? Pray always? We have jobs and if we don't, most of us would say our plates are full and we have much to manage in our all too busy lives.

Probably each of us here has a bit different way of praying—contemplation, praise, intercession, sometimes pleading or bargaining with God. And I suppose we each have an opinion or thought on how we can do prayer 24/7. Some people call it *living in the now* or *awareness* and probably *consciousness*. I think it also includes reflection at the end of the day: "How have I made God present through the events in my life?"

As I was thinking about prayer and its meaning, I remembered Fr. Virgil, the wonderful Franciscan Friar from the Old Mission who often during his life was thought of as the spiritual leader for Santa Barbara. Virgil used to say about life: "Everything is holy." As I remembered that this week, I wondered if maybe we could stretch that to "*all our lives* are a prayer" – "*all that we do* is prayer" – maybe that is a bit too simplistic or even heretical.

About prayer, Henri Nouwen writes, "To pray does not mean to think about God in contrast to thinking about other things, or to spend time with God instead of spending time with other people. Rather it means to think and live in the presence of God."

These many aspects of prayer caused me to ponder some events of my life this past week and how prayer was evident in, as Therese of Lisieux calls them, "the little way," the small things such as washing dishes or sweeping a floor while being prayerful. As I call to mind *my* small events, I invite *you* to think of times that prayer has been clear in *your* lives this week.

Last Sunday was the Cancer Walk. Several of us from Beatitudes were a part. I know that as I walked, I thought of the names of people in my life who are suffering from cancer: Gene Baum, Roberta Hydar and my neighbor Julie. I prayed for them and that this will be the year cancer research will find a cure.

I am sure others did the same – some folks even had pictures on their shirts of a child or a family member they were holding in thought or prayer as they walked.

There was a time as we were walking that I thought of what a support our 27-member team was for one another through encouraging words and actions. It's a bit like the help that Aaron and Hur gave to

Moses. I also think the walk helped to unite us in spirit. Isn't that akin to communion – to Eucharist – our prayer of oneness?

Monday evening I was at UCSB for a piano concert by Vuja Wang. She is an amazing artist. As I listened to her, I realized how moved I was by her music – how I was taken to another plane by the sound. I was in the auditorium with hundreds of people and yet felt pleasantly lifted up and enveloped by the music.

Different songs here at Beatitudes have done that for me – some cause me to choke up because of a recalled common experience within our community; others lighten me up and bring a smile to my face and a sense of belonging.

Monday evening when I got home I got an email from John Hydar, the married priest at St. Anthony's community. Through tears, I read John's update on Roberta, John's wife of 43 years. John had written how dramatically her lung cancer, which had gone to her brain, had advanced. As I read, it became clear that dying and grieving are very rich prayerful times.

Yesterday I received another e-mail from John – as many of you did. Roberta died in the early morning with John and a Hospice aide by her bedside. My sense is that prayer became deeper and more profound in our community by John's reaching out and asking us to help them walk this road in solidarity with them. I know we all pray that they both felt gently held as they were surrounded by the Santa Barbara community in prayer.

This week I am very grateful to the anonymous widow who beckons us to find God through prayer in *all* aspects of our life. Our connection is there if we just pause, pay attention and open ourselves to the many marvelous mysteries of our lives.