

Homily  
17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
7/28/29  
Fr Danny

There was once a zealous, prayerful person who lived in the path of an oncoming hurricane. And the person prayed, "Lord, let me survive this hurricane." A few minutes later, a police officer comes and knocks on the front door. "Hey, you've got to go, the hurricane's coming! You will not survive!" "Fear not, police officer. My Lord, my God, He will save me."

Hours go by and the waters begin to rise, and a boat comes by because the water's that high, and the guy knocks on his upstairs window, because the water's that high. And he says, "You have got to come now. The waters are rising, they will not recede, you have to go now!" "Fear not boat person, My Lord, my God will save me. It will all work out in the end."

More hours go by and the waters continue to go up until he's on the top of his house. And in a last-ditch effort this helicopter comes by and lowers a ladder down to him, and says, "You've got to come! You're going to die! You're going to drown!" "Fear not, helicopter person, my Lord, my God will come and save me!" He dies.

He goes to God in Heaven, and he says, "Lord, You promised me, You said if I asked I would receive, if I knocked the door would be opened, what happened?" Jesus looks at him and says, "You fool! I sent you a police officer, I sent you a boat, I sent you a helicopter, why didn't you pay attention?"

How many times do we get upset with God because we don't get what we want how we want it? We don't receive what we think we're supposed to be getting. We look the gift horse in the mouth and say "This can't possibly be from God! How can this possibly be what I'm praying for?"

At the same time, we treat God in the same way that Abraham treated God in our first reading today from Genesis. I love the persistence, but man...whew!! How many of us, if we had talked to our parents that way would have gotten a backhand? You're pushing it too far! Oh no, no, no, but I love you so much mom, I love you so much, dad. Can I just go a little bit further here?

For these towns of Sodom and Gomorrah were pretty bad. Abraham knew some of the people from these towns, in fact his nephew Lot and his family were from that place, and Abraham then went and got them out of this area. And so he was thinking, hey there might possibly be some other good people here. Are you going to wipe out these cities, even with the good people? (We hadn't gotten to the Scripture yet where the Lord will separate the wheat from the chaff and the sheep from the goats – that's in the New Testament.)

So they didn't have that teaching yet. And so Abraham comes along and says "What about if there's fifty people who are good, holy, righteous and just? Ok, what about 45? 40? I can just imagine him thinking, well I got from 50 to forty, and that's a 20% gain just like that. Let's go for 30. 20? I'm going to push my luck here, like I'm playing that old game No Whammy, no whammy, no whammy, STOP! He pushes from 50 people down to 10.

And yet, in the midst of God's mercy, in the midst of His love, in the midst of Abraham's persistence, Sodom and Gomorrah are both laid waste. Not because God is not merciful, not because Abraham was not persistent, but because we have to respond to the grace given to us by God. If not, no good thing can be done. So no matter how persistent God is with our hearts, if we don't open up our hearts to Him, if we're like Pharaoh, who closed his heart to the Lord, who hardened his heart, God can't do anything if we don't allow Him to.

How many times do we have moments in our lives where we're like, how can this possibly be from God? What is going on here? I just had a great vacation: got to go visit with my family. I get up yesterday morning, I want to go to McDonald's, I want to get a bacon egg and cheese biscuit...wham!! I get rear ended. Wham, two seconds later I got rear ended again! I was like, "Seriously, Lord?! Bacon egg and cheese biscuit. Accident. Is this from You? What is going on here?"

And normally, I'd be upset. Has anyone ever not been upset in a wreck? So I got out of the car (I was wearing tee shirt and shorts, so no one knew who I was) And I was about to say "Red light. I'm stopped. What happened?!!!"

The lady gets out of the car, I can just see on her face that she was distraught. In that moment I had an opportunity. Embrace grace, embrace mercy, embrace love, or embrace sin and anger. Because I'm continually trying to work on these things, I was able to embrace God's love.

I could just see in her face, "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry!" "But you hit me twice! How did you do that?" "Well, I hit you and then I freaked out because I'd never been in an accident before, and then instead of hitting the brake, I hit the gas!" "I know! my back felt it!" We continued and pulled off to the side.

My first question was, "Is everyone ok?" Are you ok, is your mother who's with you ok?" This was a 50-year-old woman with her 75-year-old mother in the car with her. My first fear was, did the airbags go off, do we need to call 911? She was just a little frazzled. Me too! Any time you're in a wreck, your heart rate goes up, your hands start shaking.

In that moment though, God allowed me to be me. Not me tempted by sin, not me frustrated, not me angry, but me responding to His grace. I could see in her face that something was going on. She said, "I've never been in a wreck before, I don't know what to do. I'm so upset, I'm so frustrated." And then I said, "Let's pray." I didn't tell her yet I was a priest. So we prayed.

Eventually she said, well what do you do? And I said, "Well actually I'm a Catholic priest from the church down on the corner there. Mass is tomorrow morning at 11 if you want to come by!" Because you always have to evangelize! She wasn't Catholic, her mom wasn't Catholic, but hey! I'm the pastor of the black Catholic church down on the corner. She was an African American lady – you never know – show grace, show mercy, show love, people will respond.

A couple hours later she texted me, (because I'd texted her my insurance information – it's so much easier taking a picture of those things and to send them than to try and write all that down!) She texted me and said, "I'm so sorry. I'm torn up. I'm emotionally distraught. I'm

sinking into despair and I'm depressed right now." My response was, Hey, don't worry about it. It happens, You're fine, I'm fine. It couldn't have happened from a better person. God bless you, don't worry about it." She responded, "Thank you. That's what I needed to hear."

But how many times do we have these opportunities and all we see is "God why did this happen to me? All I wanted was a bacon egg and cheese biscuit!" When we have those moments in our lives and we say "Why did You interrupt my day?"

Maybe God interrupted your day because He needed you to be His face to someone else. You needed to be that Love. "You consistently come to Me and say, God let me do Your will. Opportunity presents itself, are you going to do My will?" "That's not the opportunity I was looking for, God!"

Normally it isn't. Normally we don't look for the opportunities that negatively affect ourselves. But how many times did Jesus tell us to pick up our cross and follow Him? Those are negatives on our earthly bodies. But those negatives have the potentiality of bringing us to an eternity in Heaven.

And the persistence that Abraham had with the Lord, the Lord has with us to an exponentially greater degree. Why? Because satan is even more persistent more than we are in our prayer. And how many times do we fall to satan's persistence? "Oh, I mean, is it really *that* bad?" we think to ourselves. The devil kind of pokes us and prods us, and we fall into sin. But how many times does the Lord counteract that at the same time, over and over and over and yet we don't listen to the Lord, we listen to satan.

Because our hearts are tuned to the world many times and not to the voice of God. But in this moment, it would have been so easy to go off on this lady, "What were you thinking? Oh my gosh I can't believe you're such a horrible driver!" How many times do these ideas come into our heads when someone just cuts us off? When someone gets in our way when we're trying to back out of the parking space? When someone pulls in front of us in the drive through?? That ever happen to anyone? How dare you?! Someone cuts you in line – What makes you so important? I was here first!

We don't have a clue what's going on in their lives, though. We just see how their action negatively affects me. And a negative effect on me is the worst thing that can happen in the world, right? My brothers and sisters, those are opportunities We never really know what our brothers and sisters are going through, many times because we're so absorbed within ourselves, we can't see what's going on around us.

If we're to follow though the model that Abraham set before us – his persistence was not for himself. His persistence in talking with God, in prayer with God, was for the community of Sodom and Gomorrah. How many times a day, how many times a *month*, do we pray for our community here at St Robert? Do we pray for the Catholic community in Oklahoma City? Do we pray for the Pope? Do we pray for the Church, do we pray for God's intercession in the world?

Versus, "God help me out in this situation, God help me out here, God help me find the perfect job, God help me find the perfect husband, the perfect wife, the perfect whatever, *for me*. Now praying for ourselves is not a bad thing, I want to make sure that nobody is hearing me saying that praying for yourself is bad. It's not. But we also need to pray for each other.

One of the coolest experiences that I had on this trip that I took with my family, first taking a road trip with the family is awesome, but the first thing we did that first night was we stayed in Shreveport, Louisiana. You might ask why we would ever want to spend time there – I was born there!

And the first thing we did that next morning, was go on base, and we went to the chapel. I got chills. (They weren't multiplyin'. Nor was I losing control) We got there and I got chills because it was at this chapel that I was baptized 34 years ago. Though we couldn't go in the chapel, I knew that this was an important and special place. It was the place where my parents claimed this faith for me.

How beautiful to think about our baptisms! To think about the responsibility that our parents took for us who were baptized as babies. To rear us in the faith. To teach us God's love, to teach us His mercy, to teach us His persistence.

We learn the persistence part naturally. "Mom, can I go to the shop?" "Ask your father." "Dad, Mom said I could go if it was ok with you!" We learn that persistence thing really fast!

But do we learn the mercy? Do we learn the grace? Do we learn the peace? Do we learn the love? Many times in this Gospel reading all we hear is "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you." We don't see the turmoil, the task working, the acceptance, of God's love that it takes to ask the right question. To seek the right thing in the right moment, to knock on the right door.

It's said that for every door that closes, there is a window opened. Sometimes that draft can't get through because we've closed every other window in the house. We've locked every door to our heart. My brothers and sisters, we have to continue to work through our frustrations, to work through our turmoil, to be persistent in prayer yes for ourselves, but also for one another. If we're having a bad moment, ask for assistance.

One of the things I love about our Facebook page is that if someone is suffering, we put it up on there, and everyone responds that they're praying! Awesome! But then do we follow through and actually pray? I find that if I don't stop in that moment and offer up a prayer, I'm going to forget. So every evening when I do my recollection, I say, "God, there are people who have come to me today asking for prayers, I can't remember who they all are, but You know, and for those petitions, I ask for Your mercy, Your grace, Your love."

Because sometimes, we are just so intent on the path that we're on that we don't see that the roadblocks around us are actually opportunities around us. Last Sunday we were in Tampa, and we went to Mass in a gorgeous church out in the middle of the city where you wouldn't expect to see a church - go to Mass, it was great, go for brunch after, was wonderful, go back to the car to go walking through downtown Tampa with 106 degrees and 100% humidity (don't know who thought it was a good idea...)

But on the way to the car there was a guy sitting there right next to the car. And my brother (I love my older brother – he's been my role model for such a long time) has created this ministry that he's started – he makes homeless gift packages. And he keeps them in his car. He'll say "I don't have any cash right now, but do you want some water? He goes to his car and he comes back with one of these gift packs.

Now when I think of a homeless care gift bag, I think Walmart bag, throw a Gatorade in there, throw an oatmeal crème pie in there, (because everyone wants some sugar) throw something basic together like that. Well that's how he started. But now he's actually purchased little duffel bags that have a little message of Scripture on them. That have in them a little hand towel, some wet wipes, Gatorade, a sandwich that he prepares throughout the week, because he wants to give out one every day. He's got different things in there; he puts together these packages.

Why? Because he sees every person as a person. As an opportunity to experience God's love. As an opportunity to be God's love to someone who normally doesn't even get looked at. They get looked over, looked through instead.

How do we see the face of God in everyone around us? When all we're doing is looking in the mirror, or taking selfies of ourselves. The selfie mentality that we have these days, where I have to make sure I get myself in this picture! The reality is that if I'm just looking at myself, I'm missing all the world around me.

Do we know who our parishioners are? Do we know who our brothers and sisters in the community are? Do we welcome the stranger? Do we welcome the newcomer? We do a very good job of welcoming here at St Robert. But how do we love the stranger? How do we, as the Gospel continues to go, because of their persistence, if not for their love, and your love of them, you will wake up and make them a sandwich. Do we allow ourselves to be the hand of God? Giving, rather than stiff-arming? But also seeking to be persistent in grace and mercy.

So I say to you, ask and you shall receive, seek, and you shall find, knock, and the *proper* door will be opened to you.