

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday 2010

Jesus told his disciples this parable so that they would pray always without losing heart. The translation we heard says without growing weary but I prefer without losing heart.

Among the many heart-warming images that have appeared in the media of the rescued Chilean miners reunited with their loved ones after more than two months in captivity, there is one that struck me, especially in the light of today's Gospel about praying without growing weary or losing heart. It is the image of one of the miners surrounded by those who have rescued him through their technology, their creativity, their know-how, and their sheer perseverance. The miner is on his knees praying, thanking God for giving him the chance to see the light of day again.

From all the stories that have been told about the survival of these men, we glean the critical part that their faith in God played. God would not let them perish. God would deliver them. God who had delivered the three men from the fiery furnace in the book of Daniel would deliver the 33 from their captivity beneath the earth. God would literally bring them "out of the depths" of the earth to

see another day. Yes, it was the skill, the technology, the dedication of countless experts in so many fields that would execute this thrilling rescue but it the minds and hearts of the Chilean people and the miners themselves, it was the God who hears the cry of the poor who made it all happen. Can you imagine all the prayers that were lifted up to God, praying for the safe return of these men? As many as the stars in the heavens? Heart-warming! Yes.

But despite their being as many prayers as there are stars in the skies, the outcome could have been different. There were so many things that could have gone wrong. Could have failed. The spirits of the men could have been broken by the ordeal. The technology could have failed. God could have failed and a country would be mourning rather than rejoicing. Instead of heart-warming images they could have been heart-breaking. And what good would have all those prayers been that were lifted up, as many as the stars in the skies?

Heart-breaking! This one story where the persistence of prayer and the human support systems worked for a wonderful result is one among the many heartbreaking stories where people have prayed their hearts out and the result is not life but death and the loss and

grief it brings. For every story of prayers answered, there are so many where God's silence is deafening. Look for that deafening silence in natural disasters, in the holocaust, in the senseless loss of life in wars or on city streets. Look for that deafening silence in the loss of a loved one from cancer, or from some other illness where all the technology in the world could not affect rescue.

Not too long ago, someone who had just returned to the Church after a long hiatus told me that she had stopped believing in God when after years of storming the heavens, begging and bargaining with God for her mother's rescue from cancer, her mother died. Her grief was so overwhelming that all she could believe was that God had failed her. God was in her mind the ultimate fixer. The one with power over all things. Her God could make things better and save the life of her mother if God willed. God, however, turned out to be a loser, a failure a not-good God at all. After all what Good is God if God is so arbitrary, saves one and lets another die.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples, tells us to "pray always without losing heart, without growing weary." But why? Why if it's all arbitrary anyway? Will our prayers effect change? Will they

make possible the impossible? After all nothing is impossible with God.

Why pray? If you don't see results and all you hear is God's deafening silence? Or as you may have heard "sometimes God says no to our prayers because God, like a wise parent knows what's best for us." Do we really believe that the God who created heavens and earth, who created the stars, which cannot be counted, would act in such an arbitrary way, like a condescending parent dealing with peevish children? We are so good at creating God in our own image rather than acknowledging that we are created in God's image. When we experience prayer as something "Transactional": God has something that we need and so we beg for what we need, we are bound to be disappointed. Or at least a good part of the time. We all have had experiences of Prayers "answered" and I imagine those of that deafening silence.

So why pray? Why pray if we don't always get "results", "answers"? This is not exactly an answer to that question but it may be something to think about, an analogy I offer you.

Why breathe? Silly question? I wonder. We cannot live without the air we breathe. Life ends when we stop breathing. IT is what we do

naturally. It most times is an unconscious support system that sometimes we become aware of when we are short of breath from exertion or some other reason. But it's our breathing that keeps us alive, that we are not aware of most of the time. It is what reanimates us when we are weary. Breath, life, spirit Prayer.

If you are wondering why the young woman I spoke about earlier did return to Church, it was because she felt that something of herself, her way of being was missing. She decided that she really needed to restore a way of being grounded in trust in a loving God. When she entered this church again after many years, she felt her mother's presence. That was enough for her.

For those who have faith in God who is personal and not transactional, prayer is the breath of life. It is giving and receiving God's sustaining strength and love. Prayer is not something we do that gives us results as much as prayer as it is a way of being in relationship with a reality beyond ourselves, like the air we breathe. That is why Jesus can say "pray always without growing weary, without losing heart." Prayer is the way of the heart. Take a deep breath. Pray always without losing heart.