

Homily for 17th Sunday

Each and every day of our lives, we have relationships with others that have been formed through the years. Some relationships are positive in nature, others are just acquaintances, and some quite frankly, are horrible relationships that have been destroyed by either our actions and words or the other person's actions and words. Relationships are to be permanent. In the First reading we find Abraham dealing with God as with a friend. Abraham developed a relationship with God gradually through ups and downs of life. He persevered in his relationship with God. Perseverance has to do with the willingness to make the sustained, necessary effort to confront the challenges inherent in the process, particularly in the face of discouragement, fear, and distress. Trust pertains to the confidence that there is light at the end of the tunnel, whether we can currently see it or not, and the understanding that persevering is worth the effort. When we have the ability to persevere in prayer, we feel that God hears our prayers and is with us. The psalmist says: On the day I called, you answered me, O Lord. Prayer teaches us about what is really important and, while it does not always take away our pain, through it we can come to understand a little better how and where God is at work in our lives. To build a good relationship with God is a top priority for anyone believing in God; everyone should treat it as the most important task and as their major life event. Everything we do should be weighed against whether or not we have a normal relationship with God. God has created us with the need to be in relationships. *Three preachers sat discussing the best positions for prayer while a telephone repairman worked nearby. Kneeling is definitely best, claimed one. No, another contended. I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven. You're both wrong, the third insisted. The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor. The repairman could contain himself no longer. Hey, fellows, he interrupted, the best praying' I ever did was hanging upside down from a telephone pole.*

In the Gospel Jesus speaks of prayer as a matter of relationship and he wants us to call God as our Father. To emphasize the importance of this in prayer, Jesus gave the story of a friend who arrived at midnight and the necessity to go next door to one's neighbour to borrow three loaves of bread. Under normal circumstances, it is expected that the neighbour will complain because of the hour during which the request is made. It must be realized that in those days, to open the door meant to remove a very large wooden or iron bar from the door that was shut. To do so was tiresome and noisy. Furthermore, the entire family slept on a mat in the peasant house that was single-roomed. To open the door meant to disturb the entire family from its sleep. Jesus told them that because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. Everything depends on our relationships. We are encouraged always to pray with hope and persistence, believing that we always get something. In the asking is the receiving, and we never leave prayer worse off than when we began. For any time we give to prayer, we get something. We are transformed. St Ignatius speaks of the effect of prayer – an increase in faith, hope and love. We may not get the specific intention but we always get the Holy Spirit. I have never left prayer the poorer than when I began. In the knocking at the door itself something is opened. In asking and seeking we get something. The first gift of prayer is the love of God. Other gifts follow. Prayer increases our trust in God, that he wants our good and is with us in love. St Paul in the second reading reminds us that God has forgiven us all our sins, cancelled every record of the debt that we had to pay, he has done away with it by nailing it to the cross.

Lord we desire a close relationship with you. We desire to give top billing in our lives. We desire to let go the concerns of the world. Help us Lord to love you more. Help us to put you first. Help us draw closer to you for your word tells us that if we come near to You that You will come near to us.