

There are three points we might take away from our readings this weekend.

First, we sometimes become tired and weary like Moses in today's first reading. Some call that "spiritual burnout." It starts to take a great effort to pray regularly. We want to do so but somehow we are in a valley. Or it is just life that sometimes wears us down.

When Moses became tired, others came to support him. What about us? We might be surprised as the ways we are being supported spiritually by others. Not only do we pray for others but others are praying for us at this moment. It is crucial not to forget that.

We are not spiritual castaways, trying to survive on our own. That's why Jesus gave us the Church, a community of faith, to transfer spiritual strength to one another. When we come to Mass, it is not just so many hundreds of people praying simultaneously in parallel but as a Body, as the Church.

We should not hesitate to let the prayer of the Church support us in times of weakness as Moses was supported by others. When spiritual strength returns, then we can be strong for others. The work of intercession, praying for others, is a powerful work of faith.

Through our prayer of intercession, we can touch the lives of so many people. I believe with absolute certainty that I have been saved many times over by the prayers that have been offered for me and hopefully mine for others.

If only we could see the millions of prayers arising around us every hour, every day and every week, we would be amazed at the intensity of prayer. If only we could see the grace of God responding and entering people's lives as seeds of grace slowly growing, every day, every hour.

+I read a book about a doctor who went into a coma and appeared to be dying. He said during this time he heard thousands of prayers being offered in his name.

Second, the widow teaches us to persevere in prayer and to be patient for the answer.

Sometimes, when we pray, we treat God like a giant vending machine of grace. We pump the coins of our prayers into God, and we push the appropriate buttons for what we want, and we expect instant results for what we prayed for. And, if we don't get exactly what we prayed for, we bang on the machine with our fists and kick it out of frustration.

+I had been praying a particular prayer for five years and it was answered. Another was answered in 2 1/2 years. Not that God just decided to do so, but the grace had to be seeded and do its work in time in the other's soul and mine.

I believe persistent prayer is very important, even when such prayers are not answered in the ways we think best. It is important to be unrelenting in our prayers...not because of any effect

upon God, but for the changes such prayers can work in our own hearts and minds and that of others.

Theologian Frederick Buechner said persistence is a key, "not because you have to beat a path to God's door before God will open it, but because until you beat the path, maybe there's no way of getting to your door."

+A young black man asked his minister why their people had to suffer so much poverty, hardship, and oppression. "Why doesn't God do something?" he wailed. "He has," said that wise pastor. "He has created you." And so Desmond Tutu, now the archbishop of South Africa, became the answer to his own question. And we know how that turned out!

Jesus is asking us to persevere in prayer that opens our hearts and minds to God's grace. Prayer does not seek to move God's heart for what we want. Prayer is the opening up of our own heart and spirit to what God wants for us. When our desires meet the will of God and eventually our desires are the will of God.

Lastly, prayer opens us up to God's mercy. Fr. George Rink witnessed this. A short time after ordination, he got a phone call at 2 a.m. from the nursing home. The nurse said the man in room 211 was not expected to make it through the night, and he asked to see a priest. He was there in 20 minutes. He was surprised that his room was dark, and that he was sound asleep.

When he turned on the light, the man woke up with a start. He didn't seem that ill and seemed surprised to see him. He introduced himself to the man and said he would pray for him and give him the last rites. The man's eyes filled with tears, and he began praying in French.

When Rink finished the prayers, he anointed him and gave him communion. Then the man asked who had called him, because he had not asked to see a priest. About that time, Rink noticed the room number above his bed; it was room 212, not 211. He had gone to the wrong room and anointed the wrong person.

The man then told his story. He was born in France. He attended a French convent school where he finished the 5th grade. When he was 14, he ran away from home and joined the Merchant Marine. He traveled all over the world. He was now 82 and had not attended church for a number of years.

While he was in the 5th grade, one of the nuns made him promise to say a "Hail Mary" every night before he went to sleep, to pray for a happy death. If he did, she said, he would receive the last rites and the blessing of the Church before he died. And he told Rink he never missed a day praying the Hail Mary. He blessed him and went to room 211 and anointed the other man.

The next day, he dropped by to see the Frenchman. The nurse told him he had died about 3 a.m., soon after he had anointed him. In his words: "That experience made me a believer in the power of prayer and the necessity of praying always without becoming weary and never giving up, praying that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven."

When I die and go to heaven, one of the first people I want to see is the Frenchman. I want to thank him for teaching me such a powerful lesson about prayer and God's mercy."