

## Homily, 28 July 2013

### Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138:1-2,2-3,6-7,7-8; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-13



*If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*



“Paul!” called the woman at the counter.

“Here”, he said handing her a twenty. “Don’t forget my senior discount,” he added with a wink.

She smiled back, said, “as always,” ... and put his change on the tray with his iced tea and sandwich.

He picked up his lunch, turned around, and looked for a spot to sit, but the place was pretty crowded. So he decided to head out to the back patio and look for table out there. Besides it was a gorgeous day.

Stepping out the back door, he was dismayed to see that all the tables outside were taken too. Then he noticed a young man sitting alone at the far corner of the patio.

He recognized him. It was Greg, one of the guys who rented the house across the alley. He was good kid, a college student. He recalled that he’d been a senior this year, so he must have just graduated.

Both of them liked to work in the yard on Saturday morning. Sometimes Paul gave him tomatoes and cucumbers and other things from his garden.

And over the last year or so, they’d talked quite a bit across the alley. Sometimes about the football team, but not always. Sometimes it was about life, and love, and other odd matters that link the young and the old.

As he walked over, he thought Greg looked pretty glum.

He was sitting there, elbow on the table, his chin leaning heavily on his hand. It didn’t look like he’d touched his food.

Paul noticed an envelope, torn open at the top, lying on the table.

“Hi Greg,” he said quietly, not wanting to startle him.

“Mind if I share your table?”

Greg, looked up. “What? ... Oh, Mr. White ... sure ... have seat.”

He sat down, nodded his head in the direction of the envelope.

“Bad news?” he asked.

Greg sighed and said, “yeah, it’s a rejection letter. I’ve gotten several, but that was the job I really wanted, the one at the publishing company in Seattle.”

“You know, I really prayed for that job. I don’t think God listens to me. Sometimes, I’m not sure he knows I exist.”

Paul was surprised by that, and though he didn’t say anything, his eyebrow went up and he looked at Greg a little more intently.

He thought of Greg as religious, at least compared to a lot of college students. He saw him in Church most Sundays. But ... he had split up with his girl back in April. They had been pretty serious. It had been a rough spring for him.

They sat quietly for a while. When it was obvious that Greg wasn’t going to add anything more, Paul asked, “Why don’t you think he listens?”

“It just seems like things go wrong too often.

I prayed about Lisa, but she left.

I prayed when my grandpa was so sick, but he died.

I prayed when my folks were having trouble, but they got divorced.

... I don’t know, what’s the point? Why bother?”

There was another long quiet pause.

“Greg, did I ever tell you that I was an orphaned when I was eleven years old?”

“No ...” replied Greg, wondering what that had to do with anything.

“While I was at summer camp in '55, my folks and my older sister died in a plane crash on their way up to Maine. Dad had a pilot's license. It was our plane.

So my aunt and uncle took me in. They didn't ever have any kids of their own. Aunt Ruth taught elementary school and uncle Jim was the shop teacher at the high school.

The first couple of years with them were pretty rough. I was a spoiled kid. My folks had been well off, my aunt and uncle weren't.

Not only was I an orphan, but there were no more summer camps in the Adirondacks, no new bikes, no pile of presents at Christmas. I was pretty mad at the world for a long time.

But they put up with me ... and we grew to be a family. Aunt Ruth was a great cook and we always lingered around the table, talking and laughing. They were interested in me.

They liked my friends and made them welcome in our house. They encouraged me to be active in sports, in scouts and the youth groups at church ... and they always came to my activities. In the summers we went fishing and camping. When I had a bad day and was feeling down, they listened to my troubles.

They didn't give me much stuff, but they gave me their lives ... maybe I should say they shared their lives with me.

That was the greatest gift, though it took me a long time to understand it. It was really the only gift that really mattered.”

Paul took a sip of his tea, set the cup back down, and went on ...

“In the Gospel according Luke, Jesus' disciples were confused about prayer and asked him to teach them to pray. Do you remember what he told them?”

Greg shook his head, no.

“It’s an odd passage”, Paul went on, “you think he’s telling them that if they ask persistently enough, God will give them whatever they want. But at the end he says something most people don’t catch:”

*“If you know ... how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will the Father in heaven give  
the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”*

“Ask him,” said Paul, “and he will give you a share of his life.

That’s what heaven is Greg, life with God. It’s the answer to all prayer. God gave me glimpses of it through my life with Aunt Ruth and Uncle Jim.

He may not solve all your problems for you Greg, but He hasn’t forgotten you ... and he’s given you the you the only thing that really matters.”

Greg didn’t say anything. He just sat there very quietly with his eyes closed.

“You know ...

... with the Holy Spirit come wisdom, courage, and most of all, hope. Don’t give up just yet Greg.”

Greg looked at Paul for couple of moments, then slowly he began to smile. “Hey,” he said, picking up his sandwich, “let’s eat.”