

29th C October 19, 2025 Greenwich

Today's scriptures offer three images of prayer:

First, the woman pestering the judge. She persists, even when it seems fruitless.

She is a poor widow; yet she takes on a judge, a man skilled in power politics, wealthy because of his corruption, not someone given to compassion or generosity. Normally, he would not give her a second thought.

But the widow is not just persistent; she is canny. She embarrasses the judge in public, uses her powerlessness as a lever, to move this unmovable heart.

And if even a corrupt judge can be moved to do what is right, how much more so will God, who is all good, all compassionate, quickly come to do what is right and good for His beloved children?

So, says Jesus, keep praying, even when all seems hopeless.

God attentively listens, holds us close, compassionates with us, for God is always near. God cares even more than you do. And God, who is faithful, will do what is right.

The second model of prayer is Moses standing on the hill to encourage the Israelites in their hour of peril, and Joshua and Hur lifting up Moses' arms, when he tires.

Quite literally, they hold him up.

Their support of Moses makes it possible for him to stand there and encourage the Israelites in the heat of battle.

Moses gives them the heart to carry on; and, crucially, Joshua and Hur give Moses the heart, the strength, to persist.

The same is true for me. At Eucharist, I lift up my hands in prayer, with you and for you. But sometimes the week has been exhausting, lonely and confusing and.....well, you know what I mean; you have weeks like that too.

Then I see you, your faithfulness, your love and compassion and persistence. And that lifts me up; your presence gives me strength and faith; you hearten and encourage me.

You hold up my hands. We all do that for one another.

There is a homey analogy from geese flying in a V formation.

Flying together creates an uplift for the whole flock and extends their flying range by 70% more than if each bird flew on its own.

When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back and another goose flies point. The geese honk from behind to encourage those in front, to keep up their speed. When a goose gets sick or is wounded and falls out, two geese follow him down to help and protect him

Through prayer with and for one another, we too share a common direction and a sense of community, and we encourage and support one another, especially during difficult times. We lift each other up.

The third model of prayer is Jesus himself.

He prays before his baptism, and when he chooses his disciples. He prays in the wilderness, on the mountain, and in the garden.

The letter to the Hebrews says he offers up prayers and supplications, interceding for us at the right hand of the Father.

And most especially, Jesus prays for us on his Cross. “Father forgive them.” And he makes that prayer credible and effective by giving his life for us.

Scripture knows many intercessors who pay the cost to make their prayer real:

Abraham, bargaining with God for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah: Spare them, o God, even if there are only ten righteous ones.”

Moses, not only in today’s first reading, but at Mount Sinai. You remember, the people betray God by building an idol. Moses smashes the two tablets of the Law and castigates the people.

But when he returns to God, Moses pleads on their behalf and offers to have God destroy him rather than punish the people with death. He is willing to pay the price on their behalf.

Or Jeremiah. He warns the nation that Babylon will conquer them, because Israel has trusted in political alliances with Egypt, rather than trusting in God.

In their fury, the people throw Jeremiah into the well, where he sinks in the mud up to his chest. Still, he prays for them; even after God tells him to stop pleading for the people, Jeremiah persists in his prayer.

He even willingly joins them in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah pays the price for standing by the side of the people in their need.

The paramount image of intercessory prayer is Jesus.

To enflesh his prayer for us, Jesus empties himself of his equality with the Father, and becomes one of us, and a slave and servant for all, and embraces death, even death on a cross; all so that he can make his prayer for us real, tangible and credible.

Jesus holds up each of us, strengthens us, so that we can continue to persist in prayer, and uphold each other.

And what holds up his hands in prayer and intercession, for you and for me? The nails of his Cross.

One of the Eucharistic prayers says that Jesus “stretched out his arms between heaven and earth in the everlasting sign of God's covenant.”

The cross is the sign that, like the widow, God is persistent: God continues to pursue humanity, no matter how hopeless it might appear.

The Cross is the sign that, like Joshua and Hur, God will always be there to hold up our drooping hands.

And the Cross the cost God is willing the pay to make that prayer come true, the price for that prayer, the life of His own beloved Son.

For in the cross, Jesus embraces every pain, every sin, every wound and injustice we have endured, and makes them His own. He always stands by our side.

Today, as we bring to God our prayers, we lift up one another and are strengthened by one another.

For here God offers us the courage to enflesh Christ's prayer for us at His Last Supper:

that we receive, and give, the Father's forgiveness,
 that we be one as he and the Father are one,
 and that we bear much fruit, as we intercede for each other,
 as we lay down our lives, in humble service for one another.
 And the people of God said, Amen.