

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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The Rev. J.D. McQueen, II - All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

*“Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?”*

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In today's gospel lesson, Jesus gives us a much-needed reminder of our need to pray always and not to lose heart.

- In his parable, he gives the example of a widow stubbornly demanding justice from an unjust judge, who finally gives in simply to get rid of her.
- Of course his point is that if persistence can bring about justice through an *unjust* judge, we should have the utmost confidence in coming to God, who is Justice and Love itself.

Even though we *know* we need God's help to meet the challenges of our lives, we *don't* always have the same “holy *tenacity*” of that widow.

- We give up too *easily* when we can't see anything *happening* and God seems *silent*, and the *effects* of this can be *devastating*.
- *Far* too many people let this experience *gradually dim* the light of God in their lives, and even *extinguish* it when a *particularly* desperate plea *seems* to have gone *unanswered*.

*Jesus* shows us this tragedy from *God's* point of view in the *rhetorical* question I *began* with: “Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

- This actually *completes* the last verse of this passage, but for *some* reason the lectionary *omits* it, which is *unfortunate*.
- Because while this *might* sound like *exasperation* or *cynicism*, what we're *really* seeing is *Jesus* baring his *own* broken heart, *and* that of the *Father*, to *us*.

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Jesus has *just* promised that God will *never abandon* us, that he doesn't *delay*, and that we should *expect* him to appear *at any moment*.

- And *yet*, he knows that for *some*, that won't be soon *enough*, and they'll *give up* on God *even* though he's *already* on the way.
- So Jesus expresses an *anguished* plea of his *own*, hoping that we might be *encouraged* to *trust* and *persevere*, to stick *with* him through *thick* and *thin*, and *not* let life's *difficulties* wear us *down*.

We can't *ever* let ourselves *forget* that God *always hears* us, that he *always comes* and *answers* us, and that we *have* to *keep* coming to him in *faith*.

- First and *foremost*, we do this because God *loves* us and *made* us for his *love*.
- *Also*, we never know *what* the future *holds*, whether our faith might be *shaken* by something we *see* or *experience*.

It's *easy* to let this slide when everything seems *fine* and our faith in the love of God isn't *challenged*.

- But when people give up on God, it's *not* something that happened in an *instant*.
- It's like a *boxer* who, after *several* rounds of *body* blows, *can't* keep his hands up anymore.
- Then, as soon as he *drops* them, takes one *right* on the chin, and gets knocked *out*.

Life is *filled* with all kinds of *sufferings*; sadness, disappointments, failures, unmet expectations, and so on.

- Now, if we're *not* bringing those things to *God*, *even* if they seem *small* and our lives are mostly *happy*, they'll *eventually* take a *toll* on us.
- In fact, this will *even* be the case if we *do* bring them to God, but *don't wait* for *his answer*.

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Unanswered prayer *shouldn't* be just another little *sadness* – it should be a *sign* that in God's *loving* plan of *salvation*, there is an *alternative* to our request that is *infinitely* better for *us* and *all of creation* than what *we* had in *mind*.

- But we *have* to get accustomed to being *quiet* enough to *notice* when he's moving us in another *direction* and *humble* enough to let *his* will be done.
- If we *do* that, God will take the sting out of even the *worst* of our suffering, so that instead of creating a *lingering* pain that leaves us *vulnerable*, it *only* makes us *stronger*.
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- Now, *obviously* that's important for *us*, but *also* for everyone *around* us.
- If we've experienced *firsthand* the *peace* and *comfort* that Jesus can bring to bear on *any* situation, *we* can be a source of *hope* for someone *else*.
- When we can *see* that someone is carrying something *heavy*, sometimes the most powerful thing we can say is, "When *I* was struggling, *this* is what Jesus did for *me*."

If we've *seen* God *change* the direction of *our* lives, we'll be able to *recognize* when he's doing the *same* thing in someone *else*.

- We'll be able to reassure them that God *is* with them, that he *is* saying something, and we'll be able to help them hear it.
- But *we have to pray* – because we can't *offer* a gift we haven't *received*, we can't *share* what we don't *have*.
- A very simple way to start is with *10* minutes in the *morning*, *5* minutes in the *middle* of the day, and *another 10* at *night*.

Don't make it complicated – just share what's going on in your life:

- What are you thankful for today? What saddened or frustrated you?
- What are the dreams and desires of your heart? What are your fears and anxieties?
- Ask God to show you what he wants to share with you and what he wants you to share with him.

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*Whatever* you do, *always* be sure to leave space for *silence*, to sit and listen with an open *heart* and *mind*. If we're faithful in doing this, we'll *soon* find that it would be harder to *stop* going to God than to *keep coming*.

**October 15, 2016**