

*Our Lady of Lourdes*  
Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
July 24, 2010

In our first reading, Abraham makes a plea for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah when he approaches God. He begins to try and bargain with God for saving the cities. He starts out by asking if they can be saved if there were just fifty innocent people to be found. And he keeps pushing the numbers, and finally gets the answer that if there are just ten just people then there will be no destruction. And in the Gospel account, we have a different kind of haggling that's going on. A man approaches a friend's house in the middle of the night. Apparently he's had a surprise visitor, someone he was unprepared for. But hospitality was a hallmark of the culture. guests were not an inconvenience, but an honor as well as a responsibility. And as the account goes, the friend that has been awakened from his rest is reluctant to help out. He does not want to be bothered. But we're told, if the guest just stood his ground, and kept asking and kept pleading, then he would wear his friend down and he would finally relent. A very human situation is used to point out an aspect of God, and also our need for persistence in prayer. But both accounts could give us a wrong notion of the mercy of God and what he is willing to do for us. There is no doubt that we should pray with persistence. Or to put it another way, in whatever form we pray, however we pray, we should be consistent and it should be continual. prayer really is a discipline, and it is something that needs to be done always and not just when we're in need or when we want something. And the idea of persistence can mean something else for us that I also think comes with being human. and that means trusting in God's mercy and truly believing in it.

In our first reading, what I see is God's patience with us. Abraham, according to the account starts the conversation. In asking God if he would relent for the sake of fifty, he discovers a portion of God's mercy. I don't think he changed God's mind on the matter. Rather, through his questions, he gradually came to understand that God's mercy was actually more than he had hoped for. God already knew that for the sake of ten, the cities would be saved, but he was patient with Abraham. In a sense, through his prayer, God allowed Abraham to find out how loving he could be.

And in our Gospel reading, again, I don't think it's about persistence in the sense of changing God or changing God's mind. Instead it's about our concerns and our doubts when we approach God. The friend, the one with the bread, is often how we feel, even with the best of prayers. There are times when we feel, or are afraid, that our requests are not heard especially when an answer doesn't come to us as quickly as we want it. It doesn't mean that we stop praying. It's just the opposite, we keep praying and we keep trusting even when the answers don't come right away. We need to keep our conversation with God alive, even when it seems so hard to trust. And the bottom line comes at the end of our Gospel. If we, who are human, know how to do good things, then we can only begin to imagine the endless and often surprising love that God holds for all of us. In our prayer, like Abraham, if we are persistent, then we gradually discover that God's goodness is more than we can measure or even expect. And like the friend looking for a gift of bread, in God's time, the gift will be offered. Persistence means that we trust, not that we can change God's mind, but instead, it means that we learn the importance, of keeping our conversation with God alive. And in that, we find that God does hear and God does answer, and God gives us what we need.