

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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“It’s About a Relationship”

One of the ministries I have the privilege of being a part of here at All Saints is preparing families for the baptism of their babies or young children. I call the family and we set a time and date that works best for them to have me come to their home. One of the items I bring along with me is a DVD in which a priest and three very different families share their views and thoughts about baptism. I have watched this DVD with more than 75 of our families, and each time I gather with a family, I hear or see something on the DVD in a new way. However, there is one significant part of this DVD that speaks to me. It is when the priest says that if parents aren’t having on-going conversations with each other, spending quality time with each other, or sharing their love with each other, then, that wouldn’t be a very healthy or real relationship. I think the same advice can also be applied to the relationships we have with our closest friends, those in our inner circle. The priest continues saying that to have a relationship with God, we must do the same. We need to have on-going conversations with God, we need to pray and spend time listening and just being in God’s presence; maybe your deeper conversations with God happen in a special place in your home or outside in the beauty of God’s creation. We also need to share our love with God, because God never stops loving us.

This is the relationship that Abraham had with God. This is the relationship we hear about in today’s Gospel when Jesus tells us to ask, seek and knock.

The encounter we heard today between God and Abraham took place after God had entered into two covenants, promises, with Abraham. The first one took place before God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, the time in Abram ‘s life when he and his wife Sarai had no children of their own. God promised

Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. In the second covenant, God said to Abram, "Between you and me I will establish my covenant, and I will multiply you exceedingly. You are to become the father of many nations. No longer shall you be called Abram, your name shall be Abraham."

In today's first reading God came down to see what was actually going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. God met Abraham on the road. Abraham had a relationship with God that made it possible for him to be persistent with God. As God and Abraham are in full view of the city, Abraham begins by asking God to spare the city of Sodom for the sake of fifty innocent people. Abraham continues his plea admitting that he is but dust and ashes and God responds that if forty-five are found the city will be spared. Abraham even asks God to not grow impatient with him and dares to continue to ask God to not grow angry, when he asks for the last time, to spare the city if only ten innocent are found. God replies, that for the sake of the ten, the city will not be destroyed.

What gave Abraham the courage and strength to continue this conversation with God? I'd like us to consider it's because Abraham had a personal relationship with God that was genuine and honest. We are all children of God, and Abraham was the son and God was the parent. Abraham could trust God's judgment, and was not afraid to question God. On a more simplistic level, as a child, how many of us ever asked our parent if we could have just one more cookie or piece of pie, please, pretty please? Or asked to stay up just one more hour to watch a special show on TV, or stay out beyond 11:00 at night with our friends? We asked because we knew we could, because we just knew we could. Abraham asked of God, because he just knew he could. God understood the good intentions of Abraham. God knew the heart of Abraham. The covenants God made with Abraham were forever. The unconditional love God has for each of us is forever.

What Abraham learned, and what we can also learn from this encounter, is that God is merciful and compassionate. Abraham took the side of the innocent. He was a passionate advocate for them. We live in a world where there are too few advocates for the innocent. There are few who plead for mercy that should be a part of justice. The Black Lives Matter gatherings should not have to take place. But unfortunately they do, because nothing is changing, the violence continues in our country. Don't we want the killings and injustice to stop? Don't we want safer cities for all people, from the youngest to the oldest, regardless of skin color, religion, or ethnicity? All lives matter and no one should have to be fearful as they live their normal daily life. We're suppose to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Perhaps that is why one of the disciples of Jesus said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."

Jesus often went off alone to pray and enter into a deeper relationship with God. I wonder if the disciples sensed something different in Jesus when he came back after praying? Maybe their hearts were searching and longing for the relationship that Jesus obviously had with God. And so Jesus does teach them to pray and begins with what we now call "The Lord's Prayer." A prayer that has become a part of our faith, and maybe all too familiar that we tend to say the words, instead of praying them, and don't take them to heart. Jesus continues in today's Gospel reading by telling the parable of a persistent friend who keeps knocking on a friend's door, until the friend eventually gives in and gets up to come to the friend's aid. Jesus ends by telling his listeners the importance of asking, seeking, and knocking.

It is through our prayer, that we come to know God in a deeper way and form a lasting relationship. When prayer becomes a way of living, there isn't anything too insignificant we can bring to God. How many of us have prayed for the close parking space or for the traffic lights to stay green so we can arrive at work or an appointment on time? I have, many times. How many thank God when that

happens? I do, every time, and I always imagine God smiling while saying, “My precious Kathy” and filling me with more gratitude to share. There is a lesson in all of this asking, seeking, and knocking. When we become discouraged and angry with God because our prayer hasn’t been answered, or was answered but not in the way we wanted it to be, we have to trust in God’s wisdom and love. It is about a relationship with God that on our part might ebb and flow, and that’s ok, because God’s love and concern for us is always unconditional and constant. God is always waiting for us to ask. We should never stop seeking God and growing in an even deeper relationship. When we knock we can be assured that God is already opening the way for us to share our needs, fears and concerns, because God so deeply loves us and it’s a love story that will never end.

All stories have chapters. Some are longer than others, but not necessarily less significant. Six years ago Betty Drotar asked me if I might be interested in coming to All Saints to be the Director of Faith Formation. I prayed about it, met with Fr. Fred, and the rest is history! Being with all of you at All Saints has been an eye opening and very rich experience. You have helped me to grow in my faith and relationship with God. I have had the privilege and pleasure to be in ministry with so many of you in a variety of ways. I am grateful for the dedication of all our catechists, members of the RCIA Team, Welcome Team and Adult Faith Enrichment Team. There are many who also helped to make possible our children’s Christmas plays, family masses, and our youth’s Good Friday presentations, and wonderful First Communion celebrations. Watching the children grow in their faith and relationship with God and each other is always a good feeling.

When I came to All Saints six years ago we had one Congolese family and now we have almost twenty. The faith and spirituality of our growing Congolese Community has reaffirmed in me that in spite of tragedy, living in refugee camps, coming to a new country, having to learn a new language and find a job,

that nothing is impossible with God. I will treasure the memories I have had with these strong men and women of faith, who do have a beautiful relationship with God.

I had hoped more Small Christian Communities would have been formed, however, the ones that do exist are responsible for creating our All Saints Directory and Children's Memory Garden. Over-seeing the use of the Harrison Center has been challenging, a new experience and also an opportunity to connect with parishioners and outside groups.

I have been greatly blessed by our God. I have tried to do and give my best during the 36 years of ministry in the four diverse parishes where God did send me. Now it is time for me to begin a new chapter in this story of my life. This chapter will be titled "Retirement!" I will be leaving All Saints on July 28th and taking with me so many memories. I have been asked what will I do and do I have any plans? My response is that with God's help I hope to enjoy life and live everyday to the fullest, and to spend more time with my family and many friends. I will keep All Saints Parish and all of you in my prayers and I ask that you do the same for me. Thank you for being a warm and welcoming community and allowing me to be a part of your parish family these past six years. May the Spirit of God continue to fill your lives and bless you and All Saints Parish with much peace and happiness. Amen.