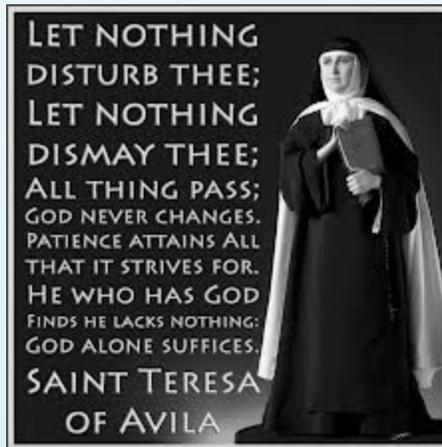


Celebrating 125/500

Jesus does not want us to "become weary" and not lose heart, an experience we are all too familiar with. A consistent life of prayer is the only response to never losing heart or becoming discouraged with life. And it is easy to lose heart ...when we are lonely, searching for the right person or friend; when we are caught in addictive behaviors that imprison our spirits; when our marriages seem to be lifeless and going nowhere; when our children can't seem to find their way; when the work we do is exhausting and not meaningful; when our political and religious leaders are not in touch with our lives when technology and busyness have grabbed a hold of our lives. The list is endless....

Prayer is the only response to becoming weary and losing heart. Our patron saint, Teresa of Avila, knew what it was like to become weary and let one's heart be swept away. She experienced constant barriers to her movement of reform. Many of her own Carmelite nuns despised her efforts and tried to have her removed from her position of leadership. The Inquisition was called in to examine her teachings to see if they were heretical. She spent most of her time outside the cloister traveling around Spain founding a number of monasteries and convents. And she had to endure many illnesses, both physical and psychological.

But Teresa never lost her heart because she kept turning to God in prayer, spending many years with no consolation in her life of prayer. If anything, what she experienced was a total absence of God's Presence. But she kept pleading, and praying and entering solitude, like the widow in today's gospel. In the time of Jesus, widows were completely vulnerable due to the fact that they had no male to shelter them and give them security. Widows depended on the Law which commanded that they be taken care of and the widow in the gospel was only asking for what she deserved: "a just decision for me against my adversary." We no nothing of the details except that she was simply asking that justice be



served.

Prayer and justice go hand in hand. Justice is grounded in the dignity of each and every human life. The widow was simply pleading that her dignity be respected or restored. Teresa teaches us that it is through prayer we learn God's will which is to respect our own lives the lives of every human being...to love our neighbor by "washing feet."

When we become weary and about to lose heart, prayer opens our hearts to receive the Peace that only God can give. When we lose heart, we become like the judge in the parable: uncaring, indifferent and cold. We can never lose heart, for when we lose heart, we lose our humanity and injustice begins to take root, first in our hearts and then in institutions and governments, including our church.

In all the times we become weary and want to lose heart, we are on the verge of losing our dignity, which in turn, is the seed of injustice. If we lose our own self-dignity, the dignity of others will mean nothing. Prayer plants the seeds of a just and caring world.

One year from now we will begin a year-long celebration in honor of our parish's 125 anniversary and the 500th anniversary of the birth of St. Teresa. Like the widow, we have been a persistent presence in Lincoln Park, refusing to give up in the face of many challenges: immigration,

cultural and language diversity, transformation of the neighborhood and the presence of many large parishes surrounding us. We are only praying for what is rightfully ours: to be here serving the needs of the lonely and poor in response to our being rooted in the Catholic faith. We are needed in the larger Catholic Church to further its mission to proclaim the gospel of Christ and we have Teresa of Avila to guide us and to be a persistent presence in our life as a faith community.

One year from now we will begin our year of Faith with the Pilgrimage to Santiago, provided there is enough support. Yes, I will be walking the Way once again and picking up and leaving off parishioners who want to be a part of this pilgrimage of faith. The entire journey is about 5 weeks but you can decide to go for one week, or ten days, or two weeks or more. The point is to begin the anniversary year with pilgrimage, walking day after day, mile after mile, kilometer after kilometer with no destination in mind. The journey IS the destination. It doesn't matter how far you go or where you join the path or leave the path. What matters is to strengthen your resolve to keep the journey going on your return home, which is when the pilgrimage really begins.

Beginning in October 2014 our year of faith will include the Pilgrimage to Santiago, an Advent opportunity for a mission, evenings of recollection in the Winter, Lenten retreat and mission, and the closing of our church to prepare for renovation in the Spring of 2015. Everything is tentative, depending on the commitment and interest of our parishioners.

However we celebrate our 125/500 anniversaries, may the celebrations and prayer strengthen us to never lose hope, as individuals and as a community.

— Fr. Frank, Homily, 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (10-20-2013)