

Homily for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 27-28, 2019

Readings: Genesis 18: 20-32; Colossians 2: 12-14; Luke 11: 1-13

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A few weeks ago, we bought a new-to-us car. Because my husband has more energy and patience than I do, he was making sure our two-and-a-half-year-old wasn't using the crayons provided at the children's table to color the sparkling cars on the showroom floor. That meant I was primarily the one talking with the salesperson. Towards the end of our second visit to the dealership, when we got the final information about price and it was several hundred dollars higher than we had hoped, the manager stepped in to explain the price and talk me into buying the car anyway. "This is a fair price. It's a great car for the money. This is the right choice. Let's do this now." I felt like he was being pushy and was put-off by the approach. We didn't buy the car that evening.

My guess is that many of us feel uncomfortable or annoyed when faced with someone pushy—a telemarketer who rejects our polite "I'm not interested, thank you," a child who keeps begging for what we have already refused, a co-worker prying for information we're not comfortable sharing. Yet today's first reading and Gospel feature pushy people as outstanding models of faith.

Despite my personal distaste for this approach, during a particularly difficult period of our long wait to adopt our son, I decided to give this pushy thing a try. Rather than praying generally for a baby to be placed with us, I modeled myself after the insistent friend pounding on the door and I tried to boss God around. I demanded that God fulfill my vocation to be a parent. I even put a deadline on God. It didn't work. My deadline came and went. Months more came and went. The words of today's Psalm—"On the day I called for help, you answered me"—felt like a lie. I didn't know how to authentically talk about this Gospel text—"Ask and it will be given to you"—with my Christian Scripture students.

I wanted to be like Sarah in the reading just prior to today's Genesis passage (last Sunday's first reading)—God's messengers promised her a Son within a year and it happened! I wanted to be like Abraham, seemingly winning as he bargained with God. I wanted to be like the man in the Gospel who received the bread he was asking for that very night. In today's culture, these Scripture examples would be followed by that line we hear at the end of radio commercials or see on the bottom of the screen during a TV commercial: "Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome."

What I recognize now in retrospect that I didn't see as I was getting pushy with God is that the Scripture examples give us hopeful reassurance that God does listen and respond, but they

don't need to be exact blueprints for our own relationship with God. Abraham shows us that God's patience and mercy make room for our bold requests. Today's Gospel demonstrates that it's important to never give up in our prayer. But looking at them in the larger context of Scripture reveals that being pushy is but one of many acceptable ways to interact with God. Matthew's beatitudes advocate being meek, and his teaching on prayer says that God knows what we need before we ask. The Letter to the Romans tells us that the Spirit itself will intercede when we are weak and do not know how to pray.

In this diversity of Scripture's instructions about how to pray and how to be in relationship with God, we can see the real Good News—God embraces it all. Perhaps what is important is not *how* we talk to God, but *that* we talk to God. God is on the side of those who, like Abraham, loudly advocate for the innocent. God also stands by those who are at a loss for words and need the Spirit to speak for them. We can confidently put ourselves in God's presence and speak like a pushy car salesman. We can tiptoe into prayer and silently offer our heart's longing to God. God hears us either way. God loves us either way. God saves us either way.