29th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 10/16/22—5:00 PM; 7:30 and 9:30 AM

Some of you might remember Fr. Terry Borgerding who was the associate pastor here at St. Cletus for four years from 2008 to 2012, Fr. Terry who later died in 2018 at age of 67. Whenever I think of Fr. Terry, I think of this wooden staff which he gave to me as he was being transferred from St. Cletus. I have no idea where he got it, but it is a most interesting piece because it is a summary of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, carved in wood. It starts with carved images of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis and goes all the way through the Book of Revelation with Michael the Archangel on top. Please take a look at it later and try to figure out what parts of the Bible you can find on it.

I have this staff here because of what Moses says to Joshua as Israel is about to go into battle against the Amalekites. Moses says, ***”Tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."*** With staff of God in hand, Moses had done some tremendous things. He had appeared before Pharaoh, and that staff turned into a snake. During the ten plagues, with it, among other things, he had turned the Nile River into blood. With it, he split the Red Sea in two. With it, he made water come from a rock in the Sinai desert. And, here, with this staff in hand, Moses is able to bring about victory for Israel over the Amalekites. Wouldn’t it be great if each of us had such a miraculous and powerful staff which could help us in times of great trouble as did Moses’ staff helped Israel in great times of trouble.

And that is where today’s Gospel comes in about this widow and the unjust judge. Jesus’ point is to make clear that, if a poor powerless widow can influence an unjust judge, how much more can our prayer influence the God who is the opposite of this unjust judge. In other words, Jesus is pointing to us that we do have a staff like that of Moses, and that is our ability to pray. The question for us is: Do we use the staff of prayer that has been given to us as sons and daughters of God or have we lost that staff of prayer like we lose our car keys or our glasses or our pens and pencils? It’s only by using those car keys, by using our glasses, by using those pens and pencils, rather than by losing them, that their power to make our cars move, to enable us to see clearly, or to write great and important messages can happen. So too is it with the staff of God given us in our ability to pray: it too can bring about great and important things.

But what is prayer? Prayer is nothing more than the ability to speak heart-to-heart with our God who is Love. None of our human relationships can survive unless we communicate from the heart. If that is so on a human level, how much more is communication from the heart essential if our relationship with God to survive? But how are we to pray? There are lots and lots of ways to pray. Most special among them is the prayer that Jesus himself gave us. The problem with the Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father, isn’t the prayer itself because its words have the power of dynamite. What a gift it is to be able to call the Creator of the whole Universe “our Dad”? What great things we are saying and asking for such as, your will be done in my life and not my own will, or forgive me, Lord, exactly as I forgive others? No, the problem is not the prayer but how we pray it like shooting a machine gun of words. My suggestion to folks when they pray it on their own that they pray it in phrases taking a slow deep breath between its every phrase. But another even simpler way to pray is to pray as we breathe, for every conscious, measured breath can be an invitation to God to fill us with Himself as the air is filling our lungs.

This staff is quite a work of art, so please come and take a look at it, but, rather than only looking at it as a work of art in the hands of some unknown human artist, please remember how you can become a work of art in the hands of the Divine Artist by means of the regular communication with God we call prayer.