

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

August 17, 2025

“Stuck in the mud of life”

The prophet Jeremiah, who is called the “weeping prophet” lived at a time of death and destruction. The princes and nobles of Jerusalem had approached King Zedekiah, seeking the prophet’s demise. They wanted revenge for his refusal to support a plan to rebel against Babylon. Rather than rebellion, Jeremiah recommended prayer and penance. When they ignored his advice and were conquered, Jeremiah advised them to humbly surrender and accept defeat as God’s punishment for their sins.

This did not make him a hero. So they threw him into a cistern and he ended up covered in mud. He was only freed through the intervention of an African court official.

Do you ever feel stuck in the mud, like you’re up to your waist in the messiness of life? A financial challenge, shocking health news, dysfunction in your family, a fractured friendship, a difficult career decision, estrangement from a person you love can make us feel stuck at times.

Jeremiah was blessed to have a person who cared for him and three friends to pull him out of the mud and save his life. How about you? How do you get out of the mud in life?

The answer for the Christian is Jesus, and here’s how it works. A man fell into a ditch and couldn’t get out. A Jewish rabbi came by, saw his predicament, and replied, “I’ll offer a prayer to you.” A Protestant minister came by, saw his predicament, and replied, “I’ll go get help.” A Catholic priest came by, saw his predicament, and jumped into the ditch. The man replied, “Why did you do that, Father?” The priest replied, “It’s all right. I’ve been here before. I know the way out.”

Jesus has been here before. Born in darkness in a tiny town; raised in a small community; rejected by religious authorities, abandoned by friends, betrayed by an apostle; crucified and buried in a tomb.

Everyone thought that Good Friday was the end of Our Lord Jesus Christ. But he surprised them all when he rose on Easter Sunday. He rose by his own power from the cistern of the tomb, and he can raise us up through faith in his name.

Do you put faith in the name of Jesus?

There are many things in life beyond our ability to overcome, and when we are stuck, we need the power of faith, the power to submit to God, more than ever.

We can be thrown into the mud of seemingly bottomless cisterns, but God is here to rescue us, so do not doubt. Believe, and he'll be there in his own time and in his own way.

Mary, pillar of faith, pray for us.

She hurried to the pharmacy to get medication, returned to her car, and found she had locked the keys inside. The woman found an old rusty coat hanger left on the ground. She looked at it and said to herself, "I don't know how to use this." She bowed her head and asked God to send her some help. Within five minutes, a beat-up motorcycle pulled up, driven by a bearded man who was wearing an old biker skull rag. He hopped off his cycle and asked if she needed help.

"Yes, sir," she replied, "My daughter is sick. I've locked my keys in my car and I must get home. Can you use this hanger to unlock my car?"

He said, "Sure can." He walked over to the car, and in less than a minute the car was opened. She hugged the man and said through her tears, "Thank you God for sending me such a nice man."

The biker heard her prayer and replied, "Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison yesterday. I was in prison for car theft."

The woman hugged the man again, sobbing, "Oh, thank you God. You even sent me a professional!"

The practice of prayer is at the heart of today's readings. In Genesis, we hear Abraham go back and forth with God, almost in a bidding match to save souls from God's fiery wrath.

After much back and forth, God, pleased with Abraham's persistence and concerned for ten innocent souls, relented of his punishment.

Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer, and tells them to ask, seek, and knock. As the earthly father provides fish rather than snakes and eggs rather than scorpions when asked, so too, the heavenly Father provides many "good gifts" to us who ask.

Prayer is a gift of God, but it is a gift we must use well, and that means persisting.

Our communities were blessed with thousand of Ragbrai riders this weekend. In reflecting on prayer, the image of a bike comes to mind.

The bike has a **steering wheel** to give the rider direction: right or left. So too, the mind is the steering wheel of prayer, offering guidance and direction for our heavenly intercession.

The bike has a **seat** for comfort. So too, there are certain postures for prayer: sitting to receive God's Word, standing in honor of the Divine, and kneeling in adoration of the Mighty God.

The bike has **brakes** to slow down or stop. So too, prayer requires us to slow down or stop what we are doing in order to prepare our hearts to receive the gifts God wants to provide.

The bike has **wheels and pedals** which enable it to move. So too, lips move in thanksgiving for God's mercy; eyes move in the direction of the Divine; and hands move up to heavenly heights.

One of the four values of the Archdiocesan Journey in Faith process is **prayer**, which is “We elevate mind and heart to God in praise of his glory” (CCC 2559). May we never grow weary of the practice of prayer, which leads to eternal glory.

God bless you.