

Persistence is Trust in God

Grace to you and Peace from God our Creator and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not lose heart.

This is Jesus reminding his disciples that hope is never lost—to never give up; that God is always responding to their needs. We would call this persistence and trust.

And Jesus's favorite way to get his point across is to tell them a story.

When my daughter and son were children, I would tell them stories about my childhood. Each time I would start, they would roll their eyes and say in a not too mocking voice, "when I was a child..." If the story was an interesting subject like family history or a funny anecdote they would listen with varying degrees of interest. Sometimes they didn't want to listen because it was related to a not so good choice they made. The ones that most interested them were the ones that related to an injustice they had experienced.

As adults they occasionally ask me to repeat some of those stories and now listen attentively whether it is a short anecdote (like my green bean story) or a more detailed saga (like why I didn't get to go to Catalina Island).

Stories whether factual accounts or fictional help us to understand ourselves, our heritage, our culture, and our relationship with God.

This past week Fr. Rob, several others of the clergy in our deanery, and I met at Mission San Antonio de Padua for a few days respite. While there I was reminded about just how important passing down family history through storytelling can be. And, honestly, I kind of felt that my stories paled in comparison to those told by the indigenous peoples of America.

If you went to grade school in California, you probably had a class on the history of California which included the "missions". I know I did. My memory of what was taught is pretty much limited to learning that someone named Padre Junipero Serra was the big name in mission building and that the "indians" lived and worked in them.

Mission San Antonio is the 3rd of the 21 missions built in California and was established in the Valley of the Oaks in 1771. On their website is a timeline of the history of the establishment that is mostly about the buildings. There is very little about the people. There isn't anything on the website about the native people of the land.

Walking the grounds I found it was quite easy to slip into the awe of the age and history of the mission. There was the ruins of the tannery, the gristmill, and the cemetery overgrown with weeds but no markers. If it hadn't been labeled I would not have guessed it was a cemetery. At first I imagined the native Salinan men working the tannery and mill, the women tending the chickens and making bread, and the children playing with dolls made of corn husks or marbles made of clay.

There is a nice little museum with a small section dedicated to the native Salinan tribe that had once hunted and lived free on the land. Nothing in the museum or gift shop even hinted at the true story of the cruel enslavement that had forced the Salinan and other native tribes in the

area to either bend or be broken—forced to convert to the religion of the Padres who were from Spain and labor for the missionaries as their masters.

How easy it was to be lulled by the glossing over of the truth by focusing on the reconstruction of the mission church. Even so I still imagined the quiet, perhaps serene life of the early mission.

I was brought back to the reality of the injustice that I knew was experienced by these native people when I saw a small plaque on a shelf at the back wall of the gift shop. On it was a short bio about an elder in the modern Salinan tribe named Suzanne Pierce Taylor. It was there because she had written a book. The book was nowhere to be found.

It was just a few words but: Oh. Right!

It has been 256 years since the invasion of the lands and the way of life of the indigenous people of California was disrupted and essentially destroyed. But their true history is not lost because they, like me, told their children who, in turn, told their children. That story is one of resilience, persistence and perseverance in the face of hardship, loss, and injustice.

Though originally forced to be Christians, over time many eventually came to be believers in Jesus of their own accord.

They came to understand that the Gods their ancestors worshipped was in fact the one God who was always with them and heard their cries of pain—and still hears those cries for justice. They heard just as we did this morning, Jesus words of comfort saying never give up hope.

In a few minutes we will pray for all of God's creation and in our "prayers of the people" we have a statement acknowledging the wrong done to indigenous people and our role of compliance as inheritors of that wrongdoing hundreds of years ago and even within the living memory of some of us.

The United States Government and the State of California have done some work toward making reparations. Yet, sadly, indigenous people are, for the most part, still oppressed and the reparations are insufficient. But they keep on praying and living in hope.

Last May at our diocesan Spring Renewal event we heard from the Missionary Diocese of Navajoland of the poverty there. Yet they brought their faith, hope, joy, and love of Jesus to our gathering.

The Salinan along with the rest of native people in America today are a real-life parable of Jesus words: "Pray continually and do not lose heart." Persistence and hope.

The plight of our native American brothers and sisters is not the only such story of the oppression, abuse, degradation, neglect and humiliation done or caused by those in power in American history. And we can't relegate it to the past. Justice is still seemingly illusive for many.

Maybe even you personally are feeling the sting of injustice right now. You may feel there is no hope for things to get better. Where do you turn? Where is help?

The scripture readings this morning are clear that persistence in prayer and hope is not only acceptable to God but expected. "Our hope is in the Lord, creator of heaven and earth". Jacob was so persistent with his request and was given a blessing, though he carried with him forever after the reminder of his need for God because of an injury to his hip during his struggle. His struggle was a prayer.

In fact prayer can take many forms. We usually think of prayer as something we do at home alone either silently or aloud or in church.

I want to suggest to you that coming to church and praying in worship as a community like we are doing now is not the only way we can pray as a group with one voice.

I am suggesting that when we as followers of Jesus participate in peaceful civil events or attend civil meetings that address social injustices it is a prayer. Yesterday I participated in the No Kings rally in San Luis Obispo bringing a sign that says:

LET US PRAY
LORD KEEP THIS NATION UNDER YOUR CARE
AND
GUIDE US IN YOUR WAY OF
JUSTICE
LOVE
TRUTH

It is faith in action; a physical as well as verbal manifestation of persistent prayer—never giving up—always asking for justice.

Then we wait, as the indigenous people wait, as the immigrants wait, as the LGBTQ+ wait, as the homeless and hungry wait, but, for us, it is always with the knowledge that our Great Creator knows what we need and **when** we need it and will give us exactly that.

In the name of Jesus let us pray.