

I missed seeing you all last week, but if you have to spend a weekend in January somewhere else besides northwest Missouri, San Diego is not a bad choice. I was on the committee that helped plan this conference last week, and I remember one meeting when we spent too much time trying to decide what to do about lunch. People at this conference usually get lunch on their own, but for various reasons we wanted to provide it, and we didn't like the options we had. Believe me, we all had better things to do than worry about someone else's lunch, but our conversation got stuck until we could resolve this issue. In the end everything turned out fine, and we wondered why it took so long to figure out what to do.

But that is how things go sometimes, especially in the spiritual life. Sometimes it seems very hard to find the solution we want. We ask God for an answer to our problems, and we get stuck because we can't see the way out. But then, all of a sudden, a solution comes and you wonder why it was so hard to find. This is the situation behind today's responsorial psalm.

The person who first sang this psalm thousands of years ago had some difficulty going on – we don't know exactly what. The first line goes, "I have waited, waited for the Lord." Not just "I have waited for the Lord," but "I have waited, waited for the Lord." Something was going wrong, and the singer was waiting, waiting for God to do something about it. And God does, so the next line goes, "He put a new song into my mouth," meaning a song of thanksgiving to replace the song of sorrow. So it appears that God changed his mind and answered the prayer.

But maybe not. As the psalm goes on, we learn that what changed was not God's mind but the singer. The person who first sang this psalm had been offering sacrifices, holocausts and sin-offerings to God, trying to get this prayer answered, while waiting, waiting for the Lord. And nothing worked. Finally, the singer tried another approach. Instead of sacrificing another goat and offering that to God, the singer cried out, "Behold I come." In other words, this person offered himself to God. The psalm goes, "Your law is within my heart." So, "to do your will, O my God, is my delight." It should have been obvious. "In the written scroll it is prescribed for me," the psalm goes. If the singer had only paid attention to the various ways that God was speaking, to the scriptures, to the voice of God, it would have been obvious. The part of the psalm that we all sang today is a beautiful prayer, "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will." I give up what I want. I want what you want. Let me follow that solution.

Some of the problems we try to solve seem impenetrable from ordering lunch to deciding whom to date. But if we listen to God's voice in the scripture and in the community, the answer often appears more plainly than we ever realized it would. We don't have to sacrifice a goat to God. We have to sacrifice ourselves. We have to be willing to say, "God, I'm willing to change if that's what it takes to get out of this situation. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will."