

I used to think that the people who delivered the mail were brave because they faced bad weather and barking dogs. Today every letter carrier looks like a hero. Germ warfare has been a possibility for a long time, but the spread of anthrax through postal systems has created a more acute awareness of the threat. With that awareness comes fear, understandably. But with it also come strategies that communities like ours can implement, and with it comes a determination to live life with purpose, to practice our freedoms, to reach out in charity, and to turn to God in prayer.

As events have unfolded over the last six weeks, prayers have increased. We are not defenseless against evildoers. Far beyond military power we have divine power that equips us with confidence as we practice charity and as we hope in eternal life. No one can harm us. No one can truly harm us.

Today's scriptures talk about the power of prayer. In the gospel, attitude counts. The first man approached his prayer with boastful pride. He is an early example of people who think they are religious, but completely misunderstand the point. In its extreme form, those people think God is on their side when they commit murderous acts of terrorism. They are wrong. The tax collector in the parable, aware of his sins, prayed in humility as a sinner.

The first reading from the Book of Sirach says that God has no favorites, but admits God is partial toward the weak and the oppressed, especially the widow and the orphan. Sirach says, when the lowly pray, it's like they shoot an arrow into the sky: Their prayer pierces the clouds, keeps going until it reaches God's ears, and doesn't give up until God responds. That's the power of the lowly person's prayer.

We got a lot of prayers going on right now. And that is good. But let's pay attention to the attitude and the timing. In the timing of this crisis, some people pray now who haven't prayed much before. They are having a spiritual awakening about their need for God, and that is good. But all of us need attention to our attitude in prayer. The proper attitude is not boastful. It does not assume we do everything right. It does not start from a belief that we are mighty and God will help us push people around. The proper attitude is that we are weak. We are sinners. We need God's mercy on ourselves, and we pray God's mercy for our enemies.

In our weakness, we turn to God for strength. God does not always resolve matters the way we would like or as quickly as we would like, but the goodness of God is more powerful than the might of the wicked, and the cause of truth and righteousness will ultimately win.