26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psalm 146, our responsorial today, catalogues a list of people the Lord helps: He "gives bread to the hungry," "sets prisoners free," "opens the eyes of the blind," "raises up those who are bowed down," "protects the stranger," and "upholds the orphan and the widow." After God made human beings in his own image and likeness, he took responsibility for them in their times of need.

Even today, the Lord does the same. Each of us can probably recall a time when we were hungry, not sure how to pay for our next meal; or we felt imprisoned by bullies who locked up our thoughts; or we were blind to a situation around us and missed an opportunity to fix it; or we were bowed down after thinking too proudly about what we thought we could do; or we were a stranger wondering how we could ever make another friend; or we lost a parent or a spouse, making the world an unfamiliar place to live. Any of us may have gone through those times only to find to our relief something else that Psalm 146 says, the Lord "does justice to those who are oppressed." "The Lord preserves fidelity forever." Whenever we experience God's rescuing hand, we can relate to the command that this psalm issues: "Praise the Lord, my soul."

We sing it today because we've reached a point reading through Luke's gospel this summer where Jesus tells a colorful parable about a rich man dining sumptuously and a poor servant Lazarus, who remained hungry, covered in sores, surrounded by dogs, and then dead. However, Lazarus then ended up at the side of Abraham, finally at everlasting peace. The rich man died and went to a place of everlasting torment. He enjoyed a pleasant meal one evening, but he spends unending days after death without pleasures of any kind.

When the Lord frees us from oppression, when he preserves fidelity for us, we owe him thanks. Yet any of us may complain, wait—I'm still hungry for some of the basics in life. I'm still in prison to my memories and emotions. I am blind to a way out of the mess I'm in. There's no one to pick me up when I'm bowed down. I'm still a stranger even to some of the people I love, and I feel widowed or orphaned without someone to protect me. We all have those days too. We may find ourselves wondering just when is this faithful God going to reach down to give me a hand.

There are at least two possible answers for this. One is, whether you like it or not, you may be like Lazarus. You don't get a meal at the rich guy's table. Dogs lick your sores. You die in poverty. But after that, the Lord extends blessings without number. Some people find this comforting; others say that's all well and good, but I could use help here and now.

Another possible answer is that the Lord is offering you all you need. Plenty of people have very few material goods, but their souls brim with peace. Many of those who enter religious life forsake riches for this purpose: having less helps them appreciate the great blessing they have every day—just being alive.

Psalm 146 invites us to reflect on the many blessings we have received and to give thanks for them. That simple exercise may help us endure whatever else oppresses us because we have experienced the love of God in ways beyond measure.