

We do not have to live in the challenges of adulthood very long before realizing that limitations, in many ways, determine so much of how our life unfolds. Athletes discover their limitations in the simple act of playing a sport. Standing at the plate, a baseball player knows that he might hit the ball over the centerfield wall, but his stature and natural ability show up in singles and stolen bases. A lineman waiting for the ball to be snapped knows his limitations. That's why he is a tackle and not a wide receiver. Excellent physicians know when to refer a patient to a specialist. Life, by definition, makes us face our limitations.

So it is that St. Paul, writing to the Romans, comes to a point in the 8th chapter of that letter where upon he heaves a great sigh and writes: Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with love too deep for words. Listen to Paul not lamenting our limitations in prayer, but rather confessing them. None of us—from clergy to laity, the oldest to the youngest, and the most confident to the struggling—know all the time how to voice our heart's longing to our God. We are limited, and all the better for it, if we, along with Paul, admit it.

Our Lord is dancing around this reality in all the parables found in the 13th chapter of Matthew's gospel. We heard three of them in today's Gospel: the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the yeast. The mystery of God's work in the world and in our lives is the grand theme in each of those parables. The seed of the Gospel grows among the weeds; it is tiny in its birth, but mighty in its expression as the towering mustard shrub and this also happens in the yeast that leavens bread. But our understanding of the Gospel's power is limited.

Limited that we are—in time and space, by ability and calling, with the gifts and the Spirit that God has given—how does our faith work through our limitations so that God’s harvest, God’s best, God’s grace flourishes in our lives? A place to begin unpacking that question probably finds us standing before and under the mystery of faith itself. The longer we live, the more we have the opportunity to see and recognize the mystery that is our Christian experience. A wise priest many years ago was fond of saying: We live under mystery. We certainly do, when ever we draw breath into our lungs.

It was Paul, speaking in Athens, who quoted a Greek philosopher when he said: God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Though coined by a person not of the faith of Israel, Paul stood before this mystery and acknowledged a truth that informs every one of our lives. When we admit our limitations, standing before the mystery of all mysteries—the very being of God—we discover a liberty and a joy unknown to those who would substitute answers for faith. We are limited, but we are not alone. We live in the divine mystery who our Lord said is holy love.

We have our limitations, but the Spirit through our lives can intercede in ways that defy expression. You may not be able to run a marathon or remove a cancerous tumor or feed all those who are hungry in our community. **BUT YOU CAN—AND I CAN—ACT IN FAITHFUL WAYS, LIMITED AS WE ARE, BELIEVING that GOD USES OUR MUSTARD-SEED EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH TO BLESS OTHERS IN CHRIST’S NAME.**

I must add that our limitations also help us to focus on our abilities. Often we spend so much energy bemoaning what we do not have while forgetting all the good gifts that God has placed in our lives. Yes, you and I have rocky patches of lifeless dirt in our past; and yes, thorns often bloody our best intentions. Sometimes the birds of carelessness

take away the seed of the good news God longs to sprout in our midst. But remember always that, you and I have good soil in our lives where Gospel's seed can grow if we will just let God do God's work.

We all have friends or family members whose disabilities have never overshadowed their abilities. Someone with whom you work or who is a neighbor that does life from a wheelchair, robbed of vitality by an accident many years ago or a disease that literally cut their legs out from under them. That person, however, may be the most optimistic, joyous person in the office. That neighbor may very well be the most thoughtful, giving person on the block. All of us have limitations. But all of us have good gifts, unique abilities that God can use to bless God's world.

Recently I received an e-mail from Loretta, a wonderful friend of 35 years. So far, this has been a bad year for her. She just turned 75, and for some reason she found her 75th birthday to be disturbing. I think that it had to do with her beloved husband having two serious procedures, either one of which could have taken his life. Anyway, she spoke of her life and her sadness over mistakes, call them sins if you must, that had been part of her history. But I know Loretta and she is an exceedingly kind and caring person. So why was she dragging up the past? I think that the notion of mortality suddenly became more personal. And I think that she began to focus more on her limitations than her wonderfully kind qualities. The sweep of Loretta's life is a beautiful example of a loving person. In my response to her, I quoted from the movie that took place in India, something about an exotic hotel. Now I realize that most priests quote from the scriptures or the lives of the saints; but my feeble mind now drifts towards the more mundane. Anyway, there is a line in the movie that I particularly like: All will be all right in the end, and if it is not yet all right, then it is not yet the end.

So let me wrap this up by reminding us that God's end game is always a world full of grace, mercy and love. We may not know how to pray, we often have no idea what to do and yes at times we say the wrong thing or do a thoughtless deed, but God's resolve continues to move through history focused on a world where swords are beaten in plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

Paul would say "the mind of the Spirit" is always moving us towards God's will, in every situation, no matter the circumstances or challenges that seem to drop into our lives. God's purpose is always a bountiful harvest, fresh bread from the oven, a feast of good gifts for the likes of you and me and all of God's creation. Limitations? Certainly. We all have them. But the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ knows no such boundaries. Name your limitations, embrace God's good gifts and see how God works in your life to bring about a world brimming with grace and love.