**22 Pentecost, Oct. 20, 2013, Jer 31: 27-34;Ps 119:97-104;2 Tim 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8**

Aimee Mullins was born in 1976 in Pennsylvania, deformed. She was missing both fibula bones, so both of her legs had to be amputated below the knee at age one. Growing up, Aimee's self image was that she was disabled. Her life as a child had been sedentary, as her prosthetic legs would not enable her to do sports. As a teenager, Aimee volunteered at an elementary school: one time she brainstormed with the kids, asking them to use their imaginations about her legs. They came up with all kinds of ideas, seeing Aimee as a superhero who could leap and fly. She recognized that these kids did not see her as handicapped, but rather with superpowers! After all those years of wishing she could do things "normal" people could do, she had a new beginning. Those kids that day planted a seed in her that led her to be the first to use the metal cheetah legs for running fast! Now she apparently has 12 pairs of legs, for the various roles she has in her life. Aimee learned how persistence, endurance, and engaging in a new way of thinking pays off.

In our Gospel story today, we encounter a person who is disabled too -- this person is disabled not physically, but because of her life circumstance....and at first she sees no way out. She is a widow, who in those days was a person with no means of support and no value in society, like how the Taliban oppress women today. She had nowhere to turn for help to defend herself from her formidable "***opponent***"! We don't know the details, but no doubt the opponent was a person who was further taking her down, further hurting her. She ended up in court in front of the worst judge! This judge apparently was well known for being really nasty -- he not only was not a believer, he did not even care about people! He was ruthless. So, here she is having to appear before him! She didn't stand a chance of receiving fair treatment. She decided to engage in a new way of thinking: persistence and perseverance. Hour after hour, day after day, she nagged, bugged, bothered, begged, pleaded with this unjust judge. Finally, he said "***because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out."*** In other words, be persistent; don't give up! This Gospel story is a parable, a lesson in which Jesus is teaching us how to engage in a new way of thinking: the PPPP -- **P**ersist and **P**ersevere in **P**rayer for God is **P**resent. Jesus' lesson is, "***pray always and do not lose heart,***" don't give up asking to God for your needs. This sounds fine at first, but then when we think more about it -- this is really a **difficult** lesson. Instead of living in the world of the 4 Ps, we live in the world of 5 D's. Life can be **d**ifficult, full of **d**espair and **d**arkness. Sometimes it seems like God is not even there, and we rarely get what we pray for when we want it, so we get **d**iscouraged! If we live the life of the 5 D's we get **d**epressed, we lose hope, we lose heart. But Jesus says, "***pray always and do not lose heart.***" God has promised to be our God always and forever. Our calling is to persist: PPP: Persevere in Prayer for God is Present. Paul echoed this in our Epistle reading this morning, "***proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable***." The difficult things, the Ds, will not go away until Jesus returns. Cling with trust to the reassurances of Jesus, persist in prayer in season and out of season.

Many of us today no longer memorize people's phone numbers. Instead, we just press the name on our cell phones, and the number rings. It is instant, it is easy, it requires little effort or thought. Some people approach prayer in this same way. They want to speed dial God so that prayer just takes a few seconds here and there, when we have nothing better to do. Get 'er done quickly. Today's Gospel helps us see that prayer is serious work, prayer is intentional, and it is not easy. Persistent prayer takes time and effort. One preacher's interpretation of the Gospel is this: "**Until you have stood for years knocking at a locked door, your knuckles bleeding, you do not really know what prayer is.**" (Fred Craddock) You see, when you persist in prayer, this is when you get to **know** God! It is true that there are times when we pray and pray, but it feels like God is silent. These are the times when our faith develops, when we go deeper into God, experiencing intense closeness: the place that St. Teresa of Avila called our "**interior castle**." Mystic monk and author Thomas Merton calls this "**pure prayer**:" prayer that is no longer focused on the self or on the prayer, but prayer which has come to focus completely on God. You can recognize people who experience this type of prayer, because when you are with them there is a sense of deep calm and peace about them. Persistence in prayer leads to this, when God is very **p**resent. Our Gospel ends with Jesus asking if, when He returns again, "***will He find faith on earth***?" God yearns for this. Indeed He will find it, if we pray faithfully, persisting, not giving up even if we don't get what we ask for, even if God does not respond at the rate we want.

Once along the banks of the Mississippi River, a young boy named Frank was walking, He noticed another boy about his age wrestling with a homemade raft. Frank said to him, “What are you doing?” He said, “I'm going to take this raft out to that island in the middle of the River. I dare you to go with me!” Well, Frank couldn't resist the dare so he scrambled down the bank and got on the raft. The two boys headed out to the middle of the river but the current was swift and strong. As they approached the island, the raft broke up and sank and they had to swim to the island. And there they were, abandoned on an island, as evening came. Nobody knew where they were. What would they do? Then, one of those paddle-wheel steamers started coming down the river and Frank ran to the edge of the island and screamed over and over again, waving: “Help! Help!” The other boy sat discouraged saying, “Don't waste your breath. They can't hear you and even if they could they wouldn't pay any attention to boys like us.” But just at that moment the paddlewheel steamer turned toward the island. The boy said in amazement to Frank, “How did you do that?” Frank replied, “Well, there's something you don't know. The captain of that boat is my father!”

The captain of the universe is Our Father, who formed you in your mother's womb, who knows every hair on your head, who loves you with a deep sacrificial love, who wants you to persist and persevere in prayer. Engage in a new way of seeing your prayer life, your relationship with Him. Don't give up, don't speed dial. Have faith, trust in God. Jesus said, "***Pray always and don't lose heart***." Amen.