

14th Sunday Ordinary Time      B

July 5, 2009

Frances didn't dream she would be doing this. She had sat in the car a few minutes, getting up her courage for the moment that would change her life. Now, she sits uncomfortably, among these strangers. "Who are these people? What have they done to be here?"

Finally, it is her turn. She takes a deep breath; she has practiced her line: "Hi, my name is Frances. I'm an alcoholic." "Hi, Frances!" No one laughs at her or says, "You should have known better."

I'm told that there are 700 AA meetings each week in Greater Cincinnati. 700 gatherings of men and women like Frances who recognize that they had become powerless over their weakness and that their lives were unmanageable. 700 meetings in which people of all religions "made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God."

We don't know what St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was. It may have been a physical or moral weakness. He speaks of being "beaten" by an "angel of Satan"--pretty strong language. We think Paul's "thorn" was people that opposed his preaching and undermined his ministry. Anyway, Paul did what we all would do! He cried out, "Lord, take this weakness away!" O how we hate weakness! How we want to appear strong, together! (My spiritual director once said to me, "You want to be so good that you don't need God!")

Lord, take my weakness away! Take away my temper, my overeating, my shopping spree, my work addiction. But the Lord said to us what he said to St. Paul, "No: my grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in your weakness."

Can you say this after me: "My weakness is God's gift to me!" Why? Because our thorn in the flesh humbles us, opens us to God's grace, helps us not to judge others, forces us to pray every day. If Frances leaves that AA meeting and says to herself, "Now I've got it," she will have a relapse for sure. If she drives home saying, "Just for tonight, I will depend on Jesus," then she has a chance.

Our weakness--whatever it is--makes us depend on God's mercy.

Jesus had a thorn in the side too. It was his family! In the Gospel, in Jesus' hometown, his own relatives and friends reject him. In Mark 3:21, his family came "to take charge of him, convinced he was out of his mind." Our Lord's thorn was that his own people ridiculed him. What does Jesus do? He turns to his Father in heaven.

We are told that when the Navajo Indians wove a rug, they would leave one loose thread, incomplete so that the Great Spirit could enter there. Because of Original Sin, most of us have at least one loose thread, a flaw, a blemish, a failure. It may be our salvation.