

**WOMAN WINS BATTLE WITH PHARMACY** the headline in a newspaper proclaimed. Capturing my attention I read further. Turns out the woman in question was someone I knew very well, a widow named Irma who died at age 97 in 2007.

For the working years of her life Irma was a registered nurse. Like most older people as the years progressed, so did Irma’s need for medication to help with a variety of age-related illnesses. This meant going to the pharmacy quite regularly. Sometimes waiting for her prescription to be filled (this was before you could do it on the Internet or by phone) Irma had to stand and wait for thirty or more minutes for her medication. The wait was long and painful. Irma decided to do something about this, for herself, as well as for others like her. She spoke to the pharmacist inquiring if a couple of chairs could be provided near the counter so older people or others in need could have a place to sit as they waited for their medications. While sympathizing with Irma, the pharmacist said that putting a couple of chairs in a waiting area would be impractical since retail floor space was at a premium. Irma was not going to be put off. She wrote letters and followed up with phone calls to the pharmacy and the corporation that owned the store in which the pharmacy was located. Like Moses in the first reading assisted by Aaron and Hur, Irma enlisted other folks her own age to “join the battle”. Eventually, she won. The pharmacy cleared a small area of shelves and put in four chairs. Word spread of Irma’s “victory” and customers of other pharmacies brought similar requests to their owners informing them that they would be switching to Irma’s pharmacy unless they, too, made accommodations for their customers who had to wait for their prescriptions.

Today’s Gospel parable is the well-known story of the unjust judge and the persistent widow. Jesus uses it to teach us about the quality of persistence in prayer.

Persistence is different from stubbornness. Stubbornness is really about ourselves and self-willfulness, our agenda, often for selfish gains. Persistence is about ongoing actions and attitudes that lead to a good outcome, benefitting not just me, but others as well, like my friend, Irma.

In the parable the widow's persistence in petitioning the judge is directed toward changing his mind so that he will render a just decision. Our **prayer is not a matter of changing God's mind. Persistent prayer is about faithful relationship to God** that expands us and our expectations about God and how God is to act.

This raises the important issue about what we pray for. If our prayer is simply about getting what we want (good though that may be), then our focus may be only upon ourselves. If instead our prayer (like my friend Irma's quest) is on "justice [being] done speedily," then persistence will get us, and others, that justice and ultimately, salvation. The key is to remember that the answer to our prayers is not getting what we want now, but justice-- right relationship with God that leads to eternal life—as we pray in that most familiar of all Christian prayers, "The Lord's Prayer": ***"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."***

This is not to say that we forgo praying for our own needs; for example, for the good of the family, secure employment, good health, sufficiency in retirement, and the like (Irma, after all, began her quest for justice because of her own need). These needs, however immediate, are always prayed for within the larger picture: what we need in order to secure right relationship with God and salvation. In this, we will always be assured that our prayer will be heard.

Whether the response to our prayer is delayed or immediate, faith and hope uphold our efforts to "pray always." (Irma, after all kept up her efforts even in the face of initial non-response.) Persistence requires discipline, and rests on the hope that the desired outcome of our efforts will be achieved. So it is with prayer: we persist because of our hope that God will hear us, that our petition is just. This hope rests on our conviction of our steadfast relationship to God who has always been faithful and who always listens to our prayer. As the refrain from today's Responsorial Psalm bids us: ***"Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."***

And, oh, "Thanks, Irma my friend, for the faithful persistent model of justice and prayer that you were."