

Don't Say "Can't"

The following reflections are by Patricia Sanchez and William Bennett. Patricia Sanchez writes:

Most of us probably know that, among many other useful inventions, Thomas A. Edison was also responsible for both the phonograph and the electric light bulb, but few of us may be aware of the difficulties he experienced in the process. For example, in an effort to make the phonograph reproduce an aspirated sound, he worked from 18 to 20 hours a day for seven months on a single word. Nor was Edison deterred in his first attempts to find a suitable filament for the light bulb. He sent people to China, Japan, South America, Jamaica, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) and Burma (present-day Myanmar) in search of special fibers or grasses, all of which he tested in his laboratory. After 13 months of failures, many days of which he went without food or rest, Edison managed to insert a carbonized cotton thread into a vacuum sealed bulb and turn on the current. The resulting glow should be credited to his *perseverance* as much as to his ingenuity.

In his *Book of Virtues*, William J. Bennett writes, "*Like most other virtues, persistence and perseverance cannot operate for good in the world in isolation from practical intelligence. A person who is merely persistent may be a carping, pestering, irksome annoyance, having no salutary effect whatsoever. But, given the right context, occurring in the right combination with other virtues, perseverance is an essential ingredient in human progress.*"

As such, perseverance is also an essential ingredient in the process of spiritual growth and development. Each of today's scripture readings offers an insight into the necessity of perseverance in the life of the believer.

As portrayed in the *first reading* from Exodus, Moses and the Israelites were literally between a rock and a hard place. It was at Rephidim that Moses was told to strike the rock so that the people would have water to drink (Exodus 17:1-7). Travel weary, hungry and thirsty, the people had become discouraged and blamed Moses for their plight. They argued that a return to Egypt or even death were better options than going ahead. Immediately following this incident, the Amalekites attacked their camp. Without resources of their own, Moses and the escapees from Egypt learned that they had only one recourse, persevering prayer and faith in God.

Timothy, in the *second reading*, continues to receive instructions regarding his responsibilities as pastor of his community. In this particular excerpt, the young man is directed to persevere in fidelity to: (1) the traditions in which he had been initiated, (2) sacred scriptures, and (3) his ministry of teaching and preaching.

A widow in today's *Lucan Gospel* is held out to Jesus' disciples as a model of perseverance; her eventual success speaks to the necessity of praying always without losing heart. "Her one resource," commented James Gaffney, "is that which has so often succeeded when all else failed in stagnant bureaucracies and slovenly tribunals of both church and state – sheer relentlessness." In a word, the widow did not know the meaning of the word "can't"!

"Can't," a popular word with some children as well as some adults, is the antithesis of perseverance. "Can't" stifles growth, crushes ideas and destroys visions. Edison did not say "can't," nor did Moses, Timothy or the widow. Today, all disciples of Jesus are challenged to purge "can't" from their vocabulary and replace it with prayerful, faith-filled perseverance.

(Used with permission, *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary Years A, B, C*, by Patricia Sanchez, - Sheed & Ward publisher.)

The following piece is from a chapter on Perseverance in William Bennett's book called *The Book of Virtues*. Bennett was Secretary of Education during the Reagan Presidency.

Try, Try Again

"Tis a lesson you should heed,
Try, try again;
If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try again;
Then your courage should appear,
for, if you will persevere,
You will conquer, never fear;
Try, try again.

You Mustn't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest! If you must – but never quit.

Life is queer, with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won if he'd stuck it out;
Stick to your task, though the pace seems slow
You may succeed with one more blow.

Success is failure turned inside out –
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt –
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –
It's when things seem worst that
YOU MUSTN'T QUIT.

A Modern Day Example of the Power of Persistent Prayer

"I felt totally devastated as I sat at my kitchen table crying. The past 10 years I had worked at my hospital and know I knew I had to quit."

That is how one woman from Lauderhill, who asked not to have her name used, began a letter telling her story of faith.

"You see they started doing abortions in my outpatient area and to make matters worse, they were being done by the same doctor that delivered my children," she wrote.

The parishioner of All Saints Catholic Church in Sunrise was one of many people who answered *The Florida Catholic's* invitation to share stories that brought their "Faith Alive."

Two questions arise in situations like this, said Lewis Lash, dean of the School of Business at Barry University in Miami Shores.

The first question is more clear cut, he said. Is what the company asks the employer to do in violation of the law? In this case, no. Abortion is perfectly legal for all nine months of pregnancy in the United States.

The second question is, does it violate God's law? It is a question that business leaders increasingly ask themselves, Dr. Lash said. "What is the impact that my faith has on my business practices?"

The All Saints parishioner was left with many more questions.

"How could this be? How could many of my coworkers see nothing wrong with abortion? How do they not value this gift from God?" She wrote. "How can the doctor that saw my baby's ultrasound with the heart beating, fingers moving and feet kicking, be the same doctor that would end another's life?"

She found her answers in prayer.

"I felt so lost," she said, "like a fish trying to swim upstream. I reached deep down inside praying often and I knew what I had to do."

The woman told her head nurse she had to quit because of the abortions.

The head nurse said the woman could care for other patients and not those getting abortions.

"I said I would still feel a part of it and I wanted to live my faith," the woman recalled saying.

The head nurse said something unexpected next. She asked the woman to wait two weeks so the head nurse could talk to the director and medical board.

"I felt she believed the same way I did, but needed someone else to support her," the woman wrote.

The woman talked with a priest and prayed hard during those two weeks for some resolution.

What happened next is a testimony to the power of prayer, she said in a telephone interview later.

When the two weeks ended the head nurse told her the facility would not do any more abortions.

"I was overjoyed!" the woman wrote. "One person's action can make a difference.

When these situations arise, Dr. Lash said people in the marketplace need to ask themselves, "Are we willing to pay the price for what we believe?"

The woman from All Saints Church was willing to answer yes, and backed by prayer she gave life to her faith.

"How do we encourage our children to persevere, to persist in their efforts to improve themselves, their own lot, and the lot of others? By standing by them, and with them and behind them; by being coaches and cheerleaders, and by the witness of our own example.