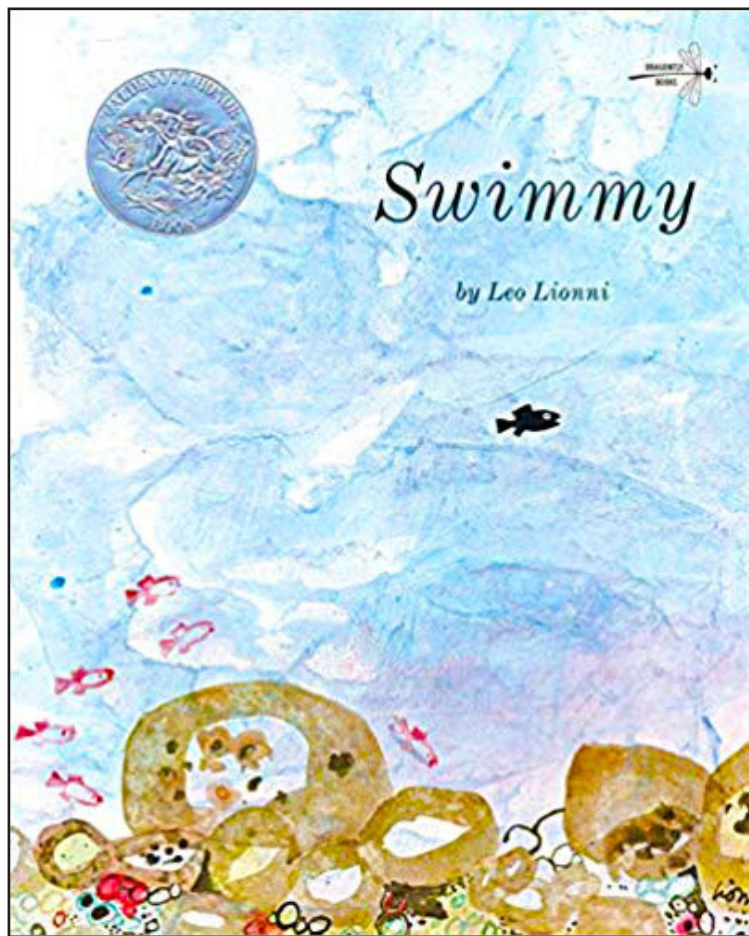


Living Grace

Cycle C 29th Sunday
Ordinary Time

**"PRAYER, CLEVERNESS, AND SUPPORT BUILDS
PERSEVERANCE AND PROTECTION"**



*In **Swimmy**, we hear the tale of a very clever and brave little fish that lives deep in the sea in a happy school of fish. Swimmy is the sole survivor of an encounter between a school of small fish and a big tuna. When he meets a new group of small fish hiding among the rocks, he is determined to hatch a plan so they can safely explore their world. Swimmy shows his friends (and us!) how, with courage and perseverance, they can overcome ANY difficulty.*



JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL

*Hand colored etching from the Bible Series by Marc Chagall
Nice, France ~ 1956*

EXPLORING THE ART:

Jacob wrestling with the angel is an Old Testament account in the Book of Genesis. This scene occurred the night before Jacob was to return home and restore peace with his brother, Esau. (Twenty years earlier, with the help of his mother, Jacob had stolen his father's blessing and the large inheritance that was rightfully due to Esau.) The episode is also referred to as "Jacob wrestling with God", and it is during this encounter that Jacob is renamed Israel, which literally means "one who wrestles with God".

There are many interpretations of this rich story, but as with everything in Scripture, the meaning takes root when we absorb a passage and apply it to our own lives. Here we look at a particular relationship between God and humanity, and the symbolism of perseverance in times of difficulty. The struggle implies a strength of spirit, perseverance, and tenacity in obtaining what is desired, and realizing that even though God may send us difficult and seemingly impossible circumstances, we are called to trust that he will bring it all to a good end. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "from this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance". This struggle also becomes an illustration of the kind of personal encounter with God that each person must engage in to become spiritually mature.

Marc Chagall was a Russian-French artist of Belarusian Jewish origin. An early modernist, he was associated with several major artistic styles and created works in many artistic formats including painting, book illustrations, stained glass, stage sets, ceramic, tapestries and fine art prints. He had two basic reputations, first as a pioneer of modernism and secondly as a major Jewish artist. At the height of Modernism in Paris, he "synthesized" the art forms of Cubism, Symbolism, and Fauvism, which then gave rise to Surrealism.

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

SWIMMY

Written & Illustrated by Leo Lionni

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable
about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.
He said, "There was a judge in a certain town
that neither feared God nor respected any human being.
And a widow in that town used to come to him and say,
'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.'
For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought,
'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being,
because this widow keeps bothering me
I shall deliver a just decision for her
lest she finally come and strike me.'"

The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says.

**Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones
who call out to him day and night?**

Will he be slow to answer them?

I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily.

But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

BRAVERY, INGENUITY, AND TEAMWORK CAN OVERCOME ANY OBSTACLE.

In the children's story of *Swimmy*, and the Gospel story of the Widow, help us to realize that in the face of grave difficulties perseverance pays off. The widow has a need that is not being met by a hardened, uncaring authority figure, the dishonest judge. The widow can see beyond things as they appear, and believes that a new reality could emerge for her, despite no support and terrible circumstances. She does not give up and, she does not become weary. Her perseverance taps into another motive for the hard-hearted judge, to respond to her need not because of justice or care, but to be rid of her. She uses his own weapon against him – fear. Once again in this story, Jesus encourages his followers to be crafty and to not give up in pursuing God's reign here on earth.

Prayer provides the inspiration that offers a creative response to restore order and safety for the widow, her family, and her community. In our children's story, *Swimmy* suffers like the widow, from a loss of safety in the relationship of the community and her family. *Swimmy* in fact is "widowed", as all her family and community fall to be eaten by the big tuna fish. She wanders for a long time, isolated and alone. *Swimmy*, like the widow through perseverance, eventually sees new possibilities. Prayer gives us the grace to see new possibilities for justice and wholeness. The widow wins a judgment while up against seemingly impossible circumstances, and through her perseverance, her safety and order is restored.

Swimmy's perseverance also leads new possibilities and hope. A new world is opened up with all of the fish working together. Community, peace, protection, and relationship are restored. This is much like the way God desires us to be as the Body of Christ. Working together in hand, we form strength for action and protection in the world.

This is what Jesus calls forth when he asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will there be faith on earth?" Faith brings about new arrangements of old realities. Faith brings forth new life and a new order for all of God's created world. Faith and restoration of peace and justice, for then and for now, brings about a lot to celebrate!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: Have you ever fought for something because you believed in it so much? How do you think prayer works?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: How do you think *Swimmy* felt when her family and community were taken from her? How do you think *Swimmy* found inspiration to create a new reality that would keep her safe? What important things about life and relationships does she learn? How does she end up learning these things?

THE GOSPEL STORY: How might God want to work through each of us with our brains, muscles, and hearts to bring about the right things? What does God provide, and what do we provide? What did the widow restore? Did it bring more safety into the world for others?

What kind of good things can happen when we work in partnership with God and with one another?

Biblical Background

LUKE 18:1-8

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This Gospel takes place in a town or village in Galilee. Judges sat at the city gate or in the public square, so that cases could be heard by the general public as well as the participants in the legal proceedings. In this particular case, the widow would have been pestering a single judge. Usually three judges sat in adjudication. If the issue was of a monetary nature then the supplicant appealed to a single judge in the same public setting. Outside, in the daylight. Judges were forbidden to hear or judge in any legal case after the sunset.

TERMS: Widow In Hebrew, the word widow literally means “the silent one”. This is because widows did not have a male (husband or son) to plead her case on her behalf. A judge who neither feared God, nor cared about the opinions of men, was known in the time of Jesus as a “robber judge”. These types of judges were for sale, and a person’s case depended upon how much they could bribe the judge to rule in their favor.

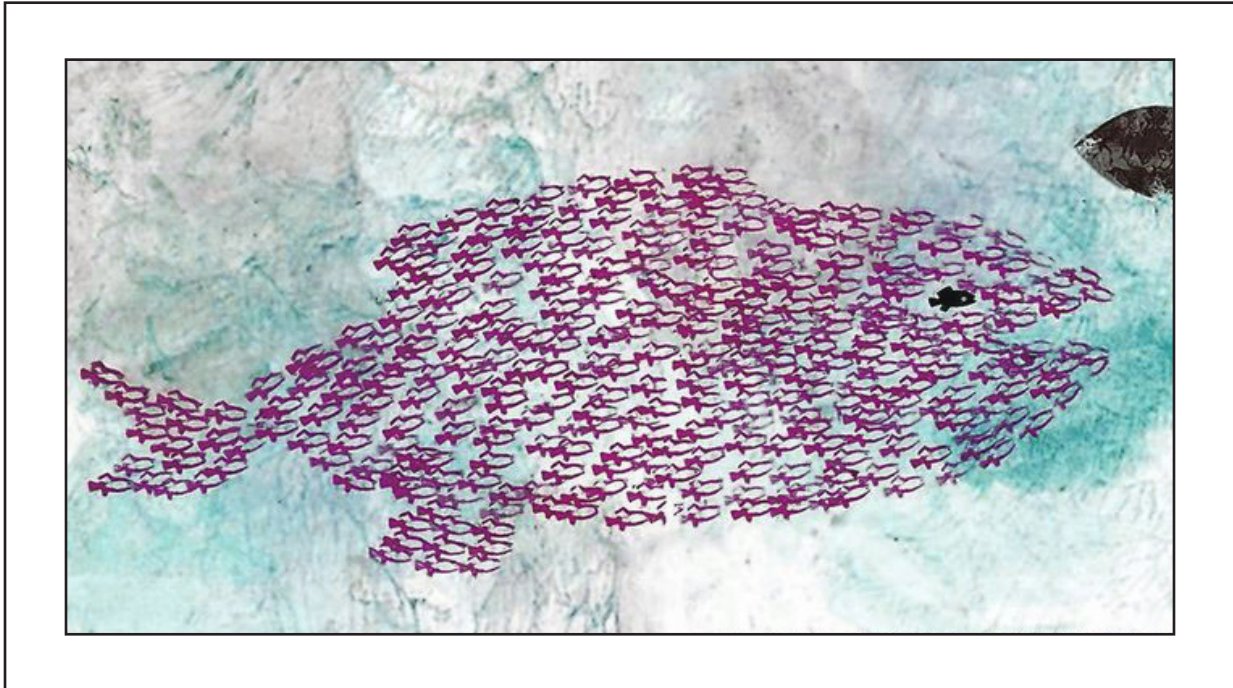
“Strike me” This phrase is not to be taken in a literally. Rather it means that the judge is persuaded, because over time the constant public pleading would eventually give him a “social black eye”. This would be shameful, as it would show that in the end, he could be persuaded by her persistence since she had no funds with which to bribe the him.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: Honor and shame direct social interactions in the Middle East. The goal in such exchanges is to avoid shame and to gain and/or retain honor. Even though the judge in the parable did not originally care about issues of honor and shame, they did eventually affect his decision in the end. The persistence of the widow, the silent one who cried out for justice day after day, eventually wore him down. Even the “robber judge” was persuaded by her challenge to his honor and the possibility of his being shamed by her behavior.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: This Gospel shows us that God also operates on the “honor and shame” based code of the Middle East. God, however, is not an evil judge like the character in the parable. God is merciful. If even an evil judge can be swayed to do the right thing, how much more will our merciful God grant justice and mercy to his children? He will not be slow to answer.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Are there problems or situations that your family wants to see changed with your whole hearts? Through prayer and discussion, explore some ideas that could make a difference in that situation.

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: **PERSEVERANCE**
PERSISTENT PRAYER

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: How might you offer your God-given gifts as family to your community to bring about a new world picture for the problem you identified? Find out about families who have worked together on a problem or issue that they cared about with their whole hearts. What kind of a difference did they make? What did it do for them as a family? How did working together with a common mission enrich their family life? How did it enrich the community?