

Never Lose Heart

“Jesus told his disciples a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart”

One good thing about all the hype to do with Halloween - and I don't mean Brexit - is that the obsession of the shops with pumpkins, scary masks, devil's horns and all things ghostly and ghoulish, is that it serves to delay a little longer the avalanche of Christmas stuff which replaces the pumpkins and pitchforks on the shelves.

Soon, if it hasn't happened already, the television around tea time will be saturated with adverts for children's toys, games and gizmos designed to imprint on our children's consciousness the need to start pestering their parents for the latest fashion or fad among these 'must have' items because "everyone in my class has got one".

I well remember pestering my parents in just this way too, and entering into promises that I knew and they knew I would never keep like "if you get me the latest battery operated dinosaur I promise to walk the dog every morning after breakfast, AND do the washing up for a year, oh please Mummy! Please!!"

By the middle of December they must have known how the judge in the Gospel story today felt when this wearying woman kept coming and bothering him with her demands day after day so that he was utterly worn down and had to give in to her request for justice to get some peace.

My parents weren't quite like that though. They were pretty impervious to my constant nagging so that sometimes I got what I asked for but quite often I got something quite different. I tried not to look disappointed when the elaborately wrapped box didn't contain the Superman X-Ray goggles I had lobbied for but sensible things like a jumper, socks and hankies.

They knew very well in their wisdom that the expensive toy I wanted would be a five-day wonder. It would amuse me at first but then I would soon tire

of its novelty and it would be chucked in the toy box and forever forgotten leaving my life little enriched for the experience.

And now, when I look back, I can see the wisdom of their choices, because I remember none of the exotic toys I got for Christmas but I do remember things like the books especially. Knowing my desire from a young age to become a doctor, my cousin Jane once gave me a pocket medical dictionary for Christmas and I was over the moon; it was the best gift ever. I spent many happy hours looking up anything from Addison's disease to zygomatic arch. And I once got a book called *Prester John* by John Buchan. At first it was a disappointment, but when I started reading it I was hooked and had finished it on Boxing Day. In the next few months I had read everything Buchan had written and was enthralled.

My parents knew what was best for me even if it was not what I pestered them for. In the parable, the judge is a rather unflattering stand-in for God and the bothersome woman gets what she asks for eventually. But it is the experience of most of us that we don't always get what we ask God for in prayer. The truth is, though, that God hears our prayers and no prayer addressed to him ever goes unanswered. However, like my parents, while God will not always give us what we pester him for, he will always give us something that is much more valuable, beneficial and better for us though, at the time, with our limited understanding and vision, we may not see it or appreciate it.

Perhaps we will only ever know how richly and abundantly God answers our prayers when we meet him face to face. In the meantime the message of the Gospel is 'keep on praying, for God will always answer your prayer in his good time and according to his better judgment.