

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–2018

One of the most highly praised motion pictures last year was a film about Winston Churchill called the *Darkest Hour*. Churchill is considered one of the most prominent statesmen of the twentieth century. We all know that he courageously led his country to fight against the tyranny of Adolph Hitler and was instrumental in the survival of the United Kingdom. Not known by everyone is the fact about the struggles he faced.

Churchill as a young man was confronted with two big challenges. First, he suffered a speech impediment--a lisp caused by a dental condition. But this did not stop him from becoming a celebrated public speaker. He had a mouth piece designed to help him with the problem. Along with that, he also avoided words in his speeches that he had difficulty pronouncing. Yet his speeches were both inspiring and motivating. I know I have shared with you his famous commencement address that consisted of just three words that he repeated twice: “Never give up.”

The second obstacle Churchill had to overcome was a mental health challenge. He called it his “Black Dog.” Winston Churchill suffered severe bouts of clinical depression from his youth until his death. The condition became especially severe during times of military setbacks. Nevertheless, Churchill wouldn’t allow this condition to stop him from carrying out his duties as Prime Minister. He believed the needs of his country came before his personal needs. It is most interesting that, despite his speech impediments, Churchill went on to become one of history’s greatest inspirational speakers, and, despite his depression, he was an inspiring leader.

All of us have weaknesses. Some of our weaknesses are physical, some are mental or emotional, some are spiritual or moral. Some of these weaknesses have to do with our work, some with our family life, some with our relationship with Jesus. Some of us, for example, have short tempers, others of us lack diplomacy. Some of us are too proud, others of us too timid. None of us is a perfect 10. When you think about, that’s probably a good thing. Just imagine not needing anyone, not even God.

Saint Paul had his weaknesses too. Aside from being a persecutor of Christians before his conversion, he lived with a problem that caused him much heartache. We don’t know for certain what it was, but we hear about it today in the second reading. St. Paul prayed that God would deliver him from his problem. We hear that three times he asked God about this matter, but God’s answer to him was, “My grace is sufficient for you.” In other words, I will give you the strength you need to carry this burden. It was God’s way of showing Paul, who was a very

strong-willed person, that he needed to remain open to God's grace. This is what Paul means when he says that he becomes strong in his weakness. In the acceptance of his weakness, he leaves an opening for God to fill him with the power and strength he needed to carry on the mission he received from the Lord.

God was saying to Paul, "Trust me, Paul. I will take care of you. But I can use your weakness to demonstrate my the power of my love." And God did use Paul's weaknesses in a wonderful way. Paul's influence over the Christian community has been second only to Christ himself. Hopefully, we can all learn from Paul who turned his weakness into a strength. He never forgot his dependence upon God; that was his boast. On his part he didn't give in to his weakness. He worked long and hard facing the many difficulties that we hear about in today's reading.

Those of us who are little older are familiar with the name Wilma Rudolph. In 1956 she won an Olympic bronze medal. However, she was quite disappointed, so much so that she motivated herself to work even harder for the 1960 Olympics in Rome. It all payed off; she won three gold medals.

That's not the beginning of her story though. As a young girl she had polio that left her with a crooked left leg. Her foot twisted inward so she had to wear leg braces. It took seven years of painful therapy before she could walk without her braces. She was 11 years old when, through sheer diligence and determination, she forced herself to walk without braces for the first time. A year later started to run. Less than 2 years later, she outran every other girl in her high school in Clarksville, Tennessee. A college track coach saw her run. He talked her into letting him train her. By age 14 she had outrun the fastest sprinters in her age group in the U.S. As they say, the rest is history. Her true story is a good reminder that a weakness can become a strength if we try hard and we don't give in or give up.

That, combined with our dependence upon God will point us in the right direction and help us to become truly successful in this life and experience that lasting happiness that God wants for us all. So, let us try to get in touch with our weaknesses and own up to them, whatever they might be. Taking ownership of them is the first step toward leaving ourselves open to God's grace, power and strength. That is how we can turn things around in our lives and like Paul, we will be able to boast of our weaknesses and even be grateful for them, always remembering our dependence upon God and one another.