

HOMILY ~ 29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

OCTOBER 15/16, 2022

It's really ironic that I should be preaching on a subject that Luke describes as, "The necessity to pray always without becoming weary." It's ironic because it's one of the weaknesses I constantly struggle with. Often when I pray, I become distracted and my thoughts wander in all different directions. Sometimes, I find it difficult to set aside time each day to talk to God, which is a far better use of my time!

Each of our readings today stress the importance of constant prayer and perseverance in following the commandments and the will of God. First, we see Moses holding his raised staff for his army to behold. As long as he held it high, the battle went well for his army; but when he lowered his staff, the enemy prevailed. In spite of growing weary, Moses continued to show this sign of prayer and encouragement during the whole battle. When his arms weakened, he enlisted the help of his aides for support. Moses' perseverance was the key to Israel's victory.

Then, St. Paul tells us to be persistent in proclaiming the word of God, "whether it is convenient or inconvenient." Paul is reminding us that we have a responsibility to share our faith with others, especially with our children. As Catholics, we must share, unaltered, the teachings and values of our faith which Jesus entrusted to his apostles and which are passed on to us through his Church. No, it is not always convenient to spread the Gospel, to profess our faith in Jesus Christ. We might even purposefully avoid the topic of religion in our conversations. Yes, proclaiming the word of God might even be dangerous at times. We know that in many countries of the world being a Catholic and practicing the faith can be a death sentence. Yet, we must persist; we must persevere; we must proclaim Jesus, his teachings and his Church. We must share with everyone our great joy of being Catholic.

Jesus gives a great example of perseverance in the story of a widow and a certain judge, "who neither feared God nor respected any human being." This poor woman was unable to get a just ruling in her case. She kept badgering the corrupt and incompetent judge, demanding an honest judgment. This stalemate continued for quite some time; but finally, to get this annoying woman out of his hair, and perhaps out of fear of bodily harm, he entered a just decision. Now, if the woman had given up early in the fight, do you think the judge would ever have ruled in her favor? Not likely!

Jesus uses this parable to teach us about the importance of constant prayer. In fact, prayer was central in the life of Jesus. We see Jesus praying after his Baptism when the heavens opened. After he healed the leper, he withdrew from the crowds and prayed. He prayed all night long before he chose his apostles. He took Peter, James and John up on the mountain to pray while he was transfigured before them. And the list goes on.

Just as prayer was foremost in the life of Jesus, prayer ought to be central in our lives as well. We need to be patient, persistent and believing in our prayer. After all, if even an unjust judge surrenders to a lowly widow who kept pleading her case, how much more will God, who is our loving Father, listen to the persistent prayers of his children?

Nor should we get discouraged when God does not answer our prayers as quickly as we want or in the way we think he should. God sees the present and the future; he knows, far better than we, what is best for us. We see that in Jesus' own prayer in the garden before his passion. He pleaded, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." He knew precisely what he was facing: a mock trial, a horrible scourging, being insulted and spat upon, crowned with thorns and executed in the most humiliating, most painful, cruelest death imaginable. Of course, he wanted to avoid this. Yet, he surrendered to his Father's will. By denying the most passionate, most urgent prayer of his Son, this greatest of all evils then became the greatest of all good, the most awesome act of love imaginable—the forgiveness of sins—and the opened door to paradise.

Some 350 years after Jesus told this parable to his disciples, a woman in North Africa continuously flooded heaven with prayers for the conversion of her son. It seems this young man was wasting his life away drinking, carousing and spending a lot of time with loose women. While very brilliant, he seemed content to squander his abilities and talents. Like the widow in the Gospel, this mother, would not give up, even though she could see no immediate response. After nearly 20 years, Monica's prayers were answered. Indeed, they were answered in ways she could never have imagined. Her son not only changed his lifestyle, but at age 36, he was ordained a priest. At the age of 41, he was ordained a bishop and was bishop of Hippo in North Africa for 35 years. Today, St. Augustine is considered one of the Church's greatest saints and a doctor of the Church.

Of course, Jesus wants us to pray for favors, healings, blessings and even miracles. But, I am convinced that first and foremost, our prayer should be motivated by our genuine love of God. Love, praise and surrender to the Father who created us and gave us life; love and thanksgiving to the Son who became one of us, so our sins could be forgiven and the gates of heaven opened to us; love of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us in our weakness and guides us. God is our most loving Father, our best friend, "the most tender spouse of our soul." St. Therese of Lisieux wrote in her autobiography: "Prayer, for me, is simply a raising of the heart, a simple glance toward heaven, an expression of love and gratitude in the midst of a trial as well as in times of joy; in a word, it is something noble and supernatural expanding my soul and uniting it to God."

Lord, let our prayer begin by contemplating your eternal love for us and your infinite mercy. Give us the grace to persevere in our prayers and to trust that you will grant what is most beneficial to us. Then, allow our love for you to grow from this tiny ember to a raging inferno. Amen.

Peace,
Deacon Don