

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 147

Reading 1 [EX 17:8-13](#)

In those days, Amalek came and waged war against Israel. Moses, therefore, said to Joshua, "Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him: he engaged Amalek in battle after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. Moses' hands, however, grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8](#) - R.(cf. 2) Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Reading 2 [2 TM 3:14-4:2](#)

Beloved: Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it, and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

Gospel [LK 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 who 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?"

Cor ad cor loquitur - ("Heart speaks unto heart") – Cardinal St. John Henry Newman

The readings today have a strong emphasis on prayer, which we can say is essential to a fruitful relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a relationship which is to be marked by divine intimacy. We also see the importance of the fruit of prayer which is action; action that leads to greater knowledge and understanding of our faith and increasing works of corporal and spiritual mercy. Therefore, emphasizing the first and Gospel readings, we focus our reflections on the subjects of 'Ora et Labora' (prayer and work... born of the gift of faith). And, emphasizing the second and Gospel readings, we focus on 'Orthodoxy' and 'Orthopraxis' (right believing and right action – born of the gift of faith).

It is in seeing the readings in this light, that we are able to understand the question at the end of the Gospel reading: When Jesus returns, will He find us strong, having endured trials and tribulation faithfully by persistent prayer and uncompromising action. Or, having become 'lukewarm', will He find us weak, ineffective, asleep and slaves once again to ourselves in sin having forsaken the freedom for which Christ made us free.

Part One: Prayer like breathing, is essential to human life

To the degree that faith begins to wane within us, our desire and ability to pray is also diminished. As St. Augustin said, faith pours out prayer, and the pouring out of prayer obtains the strengthening of faith. "Prayer is in fact the recognition of our limitation and our dependence: we come from God, we belong to God and we return to God! We cannot, therefore, but abandon ourselves to Him, our Creator and Lord, with full and complete confidence [...]. "Prayer, therefore, is first of all an act of intelligence, a disposition of humility and gratitude, an attitude of trust and abandonment to Him who gave us life out of love. "Prayer is a mysterious but real dialogue with God, a dialogue of confidence and love." It helps us to become open vessels for God to pour down His grace so that we can raise our hearts and minds to God and that our will is indistinguishable from the will of the Father. This mysterious and real dialogue awakens us and we must not fail to act in accord. That is, to be unceasingly and, increasingly engaged in the battle together in the mission field. If we are to be able never to surrender, never to abandon our brothers and sisters – then we must never cease praying.

The narrative of the first reading has two unmistakable emphases that must not be overlooked if our faith is to be firm and fertile. We must continue to pray without ceasing, even when weariness might set in and to rely on others to help us, to lift us. We are indeed a communion of persons united in the family of God, participants in the divine life through Christ. As it was in the time of Moses so it is now, we must rally to each other in our weariness and raise our arms in persistent prayer... for we are indeed in a battle with the enemy in the world and in the church. But, we are assured that as long as we stay rooted in Him, he will abide with us and there will be victory, His victory, the completion of the victory of the Cross.

The Israelites were on a journey and the battle with Amalek takes place in the midst of the many challenges of that journey from their initial freedom to the promised land. This can be seen as a 'type' for us, of the journey that we too are on, after having been set free – born again through the waters of baptism and the fire of the Holy Spirit. We too are in the midst of our journey from our initial freedom

to our eternal home the promised land. On that journey the enemy lurks about and maneuvers to overcome us. Just as the Amalekite raiders attacked the weakest Israelites who lagged behind the main camp, left to suffer their weaknesses and weariness by their brothers and sisters and to fall prey to the enemy and die. We must learn from the chosen people, both what to do and what to avoid. Our prayers cannot become rote and empty, separated from relationship with Christ and fruitless. They must not become like the pharisee who goes to the temple and prays alone, in thanksgiving that he's better than everyone else. Our prayers must be fruitful. They must be expressions of authentic communion with God and lead to divine intimacy. They must be fertile and give rise to all corporal and merciful good works which leave no one behind, unprotected, alone.

Yes, our help is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. Yet, he did not create us to be an army of one. Rather he made us to be many who become one in Him. "Look, O Lord, upon the Sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church, and grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory."

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has written that Moses, with both arms lifted up in prayer, strikes a pose on the mountaintop much like Christ on the cross and prefigures the great prayer to the Father that was the Passion and Crucifixion, the great prayer which defeated the Enemy of God's people definitively. We participate in that great Prayer of Christ on the cross at every Mass. So too then, our help is in the Church, the sacrament of salvation where the source and summit of our faith becomes present; body, blood, soul and divinity in the midst of the mystical body in worship. The mystical body of Christ the Church which is engaged in the highest prayer and which is offered without ceasing every hour of every day somewhere in the world. The prayer of the Church militant, at that moment, united with the prayer of the Church triumphant, for the victory of the salvation of the world.

The Church, like Christ, is both divine and human. Although we can never lose hope in the promise of our Lord and Savior that according to the divine origins of His Church the gates of hell will not prevail; it will remain true to its mission until the end of time. We also can never forget that not every member of the Mystical Body will remain faithful. We have seen this truth in the lives of others and in our own varied unfaithfulness. As we have been taught, we must remain watchful and prayerful. "Look, O Lord, upon the Sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church, and grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory."

We have received the gift of faith and by our commitment to faith sustaining prayer that leads to action in the mission field, we manifest our understanding of, commitment to and humble surrender in total dependence on God. We are declaring that without Him there is no hope and no victory, because without Him we truly can do nothing. We cling to the Cross of Christ as Moses clung to and lifted high the wood of the rod in his unworthy hands. Moses was not on the battlefield against the enemy on that day, but he was none the less a warrior, a prayer warrior whose efforts, God tells us in the living Word... were essential to the victory.

Part Two: Missionaries succeed when they make missionary disciples

Our new Saint, Cardinal John Henry Newman, had as his motto “Heart speaks to heart”. I mention this because it is both central to our relationship with the persons of the Trinity, as well as with each other and, our missionary activity will be ineffective if we do not engage each other, heart to heart. We must be open hearted, making ourselves authentically available to accompaniment and communion with others, but first and foremost in divine intimacy with the Trinitarian persons. Saint, Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690) wrote: “Set up your abode in this loving Heart of Jesus and you will there find lasting peace and the strength both to bring to fruition all the good desires he inspires in you, and to avoid every deliberate fault. Place in this Heart all your sufferings and difficulties. Everything that comes from the Sacred Heart is sweet. He changes everything into love.” St. Margaret, St. Newman and Blessed Georgio deeply understood that, to live love, we must continually draw from the well spring of Love, from the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Rooted in the Sacred Heart of Jesus we reach out into the mission field, and although most of us lack great eloquence of speech and deep theological knowledge, all of us are capable of profound sincerity and an abundance of passion. These are the most important qualifications for witnessing to our faith and are the most convincing when we try to share with someone. The greatest arguments will never reach the depths of the soul with the ease of words spoken from the depths of our hearts about the love of God and how it has set us free.

The 2nd-Century Church Father St Irenaeus of Lyons famously said that “the glory of God is man fully alive”. Building on the teachings of the church fathers, we also find in USCCB documents that; *“To create a culture of encounter and witness, we must live explicit lives of discipleship. We are called not only to believe in the Gospel but to allow it to take deep root in us in a way that leaves us incapable of silence: we cannot help but to announce the Gospel in word and in deed. This missionary outreach is at the heart of discipleship.”* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization p. 14*)

In the first paragraph of the second reading, St. Paul is exhorting Timothy to have and to safeguard his right belief, his ‘orthodoxy’. “Beloved: Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it, and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

In the second paragraph the emphasis is on the most important aspect of right action, ‘orthopraxis’. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.” This we do through the manifestation of our faith in the way we think, choose, live and speak.

We are empowered to be missionary disciples who live from the heart of Christ drawing others to the heart of Christ... Therefore we must know the truth, be found to be living the truth and be prepared to teach the truth: in no uncertain terms. We must be willing, ready and able to set the direction that we

are going and invite others to come along on that journey. We must be very clear about the destination, where we going, where we are leading; whether anyone follows or not.

We have all, at least casually, heard that we cannot give what we do not possess. We cannot teach what we do not know. We must take these words to heart, alongside those of St. Paul to Timothy and by extension to the generations of their spiritual children. Our Interior life must impel us toward the missionary imperative; leading us into the mission field, the battle field and to give reason for our faith; to put our intellect at the service of mission and to lead others into their salvation through encounter with Christ upon hearing and understanding the Good News we share.

Pope Francis spoke about the missionary imperative saying: *“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the church’s journey in years to come.”* (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium para. 1*)

We must avoid falling; we must not fail. We must be vigilant in our mission, persistent in our prayer. Remember the times of Noah and of Lot. In both cases, they were unready. They were not watchful. They were not prayerful. They were not ready when judgment came. There was no saving faith at work. They were busy about their everyday affairs. They were lulled to sleep by the ordinary things of life. They had no thought of eternal things but only business as usual.

The world of the lost needs to hear our message. They, like we once were, are like the judge in the Gospel parable. They have no fear of a God they do not know. They persist in refusing to listen and to see. We, the missionaries of God’s healing love and mercy, must be like the widow who will not go away. We must be a ‘holy nuisance’. Just as God is persistent, so to must we be persistent as others were persistent in prayer and action for the sake of our salvation. We must be unrelenting in seeking justice, proclaiming truth, calling forth mercy and building the culture of life.

Young people, this is your moment in history, in the history of the Church. God is calling forth saints among you now just as God had called forth the saints in the early Church and every other challenging time in history. Through the graces of the sacraments you receive, the gifts which you have been given by the Holy Spirit... none of which has been solely for your own good, but rather also to be poured out through you for the salvation of the world and the strengthening of the Church. In you God desires to grow an insatiable hunger and thirst for holiness and for you to become passionate and uncompromising revolutionaries of love in the world and provocateurs in the Church. Revolutionaries that set the earth ablaze with faith and provocateurs who call forth unparalleled holiness among the faithful.

LIVE the FAITH, LOVE as CHRIST, LEARN the FAITH, LEAD as CHRIST.

This is the foundational text from which Fr. Blair Gaynes preached a homily in two parts on World Mission Sunday – 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time. The first part was preached during a Vigil Mass offered for college students on the Campus of the University of North Florida. The second was preached during a regional gathering of Youth and Young Adults for the Sunday Mass at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Jacksonville Florida, offered for the spiritual needs of the youth, young adults and college students of Duval County in the diocese of St. Augustine Florida.

