

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, October 20, 2019.

## DO NOT GIVE UP

Our key note verse is “Will God not secure the rights of his oppressed who call out to him day and night?” (Luke 18:7).

Last Sunday we explored the theme - God is the God of all nations and peoples and we concluded that nobody is excluded from God’s gift of salvation. The word of God says, “God has revealed to the nations his saving power” (Psalm 98:2). The two beautiful stories from the Old and New Testaments about healing from leprosy illustrate this fact. The act of healing from leprosy symbolizes God’s healing of every nation and people from the alienation and banishment brought about by sin (Genesis 3:23). Both healing from leprosy stories presented us with afflicted people who persisted in making themselves available for healing. For instance, Naaman did not refuse to go to the foreign country of Israel and to bathe in the river Jordan, which was no cleaner than the rivers, Abana and Pharpar, in his home city of Damascus (2 Kings 5:12). The ten lepers in the gospel persistently cried out to the Lord, “Jesus Master, have pity on us” (Luke 17:13). They did not give up. They did not wallow in a defeatist position that they were already shunned, banished and quarantined. This brings us to the theme of today’s homily – Do not give up! In other words, remember that persistence pays! The word of God says, “Will not God secure the rights of his oppressed who call out to him day and night” (Luke 18:7). This assurance comes from the mouth of our Lord, himself. He illustrates this promise through the parable of a persistent widow, thereby urging us to pray and not grow weary. The widow sought justice from a godless and pitiless judge. She did not allow herself to be put off by the indifference of the judge, and at the end of the day she received a just decision.

The story of the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites in the first reading today bears the same message of perseverance in prayer. “As long as Moses kept his hand raised up, Israel has the better of the fight” (Exodus 17:11). Moses’ raised hand symbolizes the *orans* or the praying posture. Also, Moses with his arms uplifted is a symbol of Christ on his cross on the mount of Calvary. It is there that the Lord vanquished our final enemies of sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:26).

To show that our journey with God is not a solitary or individualistic affair, Moses enlisted the help of Aaron and Hur, when his hands grew tired. At the same time, Joshua and the rest of the warriors wielded their swords unremittingly against the enemy. The battle was won in favor of Moses and his men who persevered. This situation illustrates, without equivocation, that as you do not rejoice alone when good things happen, you are not alone in the time of trouble. Our help comes from God, who made heaven and earth. Do not forget to cry out to God in prayer and also utilize the prayers of your fellow believers when you are in trouble. One tree does not make a forest. Our journey with God is a "we" affair - not one of “me and I" alone! As you persevere you will soon discover that our God is *Yahwehnissi*; our God is my banner and victory (Exodus 17:15). The reason why you should not give up is that God’s time is the best. God may not give you what you are asking within your time schedule, because he wants to give you first the greater gifts of patience and humility.

A question that comes to mind in light of the readings today is why do we need to pray, since God already knows all things, even what is in our heart? St. Augustine, the great Bishop of Hippo and our patron saint, wrestled with this question this way.

Why he should ask us to pray, when he knows what we need before we ask him may perplex us if we do not realize that our Lord and God does not want to know what we want (for he cannot fail to know it), but wants us rather to exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us. His gift is very great indeed, but our capacity is too small and limited to receive it. That is why we are told: Enlarge your desires; do not bear the yoke with unbelievers. (St Augustine, *Letter to Proba*).

This means that when we pray, we are not educating God on what we desire. Rather, we are opening wide our hearts and hands to receive what God in his benevolence wants to give us.

Summing up, the word of God assures us of God's nearness to us not simply in our time of need, but at all times. Through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Lord says, "You will seek me, and when you seek with your whole heart, you will find me. You will pray to me, and I will listen to you. I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for your welfare and not for misfortune, plans that will give you a future full of hope (Jeremiah 29: 13, 12, 11). Persistence pays.

The holy Mother the Church teaches,

Pray constantly...always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. "St. Paul adds, "Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication." To that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints.... This tireless fervor can come only from love. Against our dullness and laziness, the battle of prayer is that of humble, trusting, and persevering love (CCC 2742).

Persevering love opens our hearts and minds to three wonderful things about prayer: 1. It is always possible to pray; 2. Prayer is a vital necessity and 3. Prayer and Christian life are inseparable (CCC 2743-2745).