Sometimes we can forget that God has a sense of humor! We see two great examples in today’s readings. First, we have the Gospel parable about the dishonest judge that will render a just decision, not because it’s the right thing to do but because the judge is tired of being nagged to death. In the first reading, we also have that interesting situation of Amalek trying to engage the Israelites in battle. So long as Moses’ arms are in the air, the Israelites get the better of Amalek and his troops. But when Moses’ arms begin to get tired, Amalek’s group gets the better of the Israelites. What is the Israelites solution? Aaron and Hur show up to give support to Moses’ arms. “Keep those arms up Moses!”

The moral of the stories? Be persistent with our prayers! Jesus invites us to be persistent in our prayer life! Jesus however also asks the rhetorical question, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” This is a haunting question, isn’t it? “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith?

My friends, instead of seeing the two warring tribes of the first reading in historical terms, I like to look at it in spiritual terms. You see, there are many times in life when I feel like there is a war being engaged inside my heart. It is a battle between my virtues and my vices. When I keep my spiritual arms up in prayer, like Moses, I tend to get the better of the vices inside of me, warring against me, threatening to overtake me. When my prayer life begins to lax, the battle within the heart rages all the more. I begin to lose ground in the spirit life. I really liked the fact that Moses needed his friends, Aaron and Hur, to help support him in his prayer life. I know in my life, I can’t do it alone. I need my family, friends, my worshiping community, the intercession of the saints to help me.

Our faith is communitarian in nature. Along those lines, have you considered that a friendship with God is a lot like friendships with people? Do you want a sure fire way to destroy a friendship with someone? Refuse to communicate with them. Prayer is how we communicate with God and allow God to blossom in our hearts. How do we grow in our relationship with God? The second reading says it pretty clearly. Know the Sacred
Scriptures, which are capable of giving us wisdom for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. When I listen to people describe who Jesus is for them, I sometimes find it difficult to find that Jesus in the Gospel. Reading a little Sacred Scripture each day keeps our ignorance at bay. Reading Scripture, of course, also requires persistence. Why does Jesus invite us to be persistent in our prayer life? God cannot have a relationship with you if you don’t take the time to get to know him or talk to him. A relationship with God begins with prayer.

And there are so many different kinds of prayers in the spirit life, aren’t there? First of all, there is spontaneous prayer. These are the honest prayers that come forth from the wellspring of our hearts. This is a good kind of prayer when the wellspring is full. When the wellspring of our hearts is not full, when we are dry inside, or perhaps our hearts are so full that trying to put our prayer into words cheapens what our heart wants to say, we have traditional prayers. The rosary is a great prayer because the repetition of the Hail Marys and the Our Fathers serve as a mantra of sorts. The repetitions of these prayers help scrub the mind of useless chatter. They help us focus our attention to the sacred mysteries and the in-utter-able language of heart. Some people like to jump start their prayer life with a novena. A novena is a nine-day spirituality and there are a million of them out there.

A popular devotion is the liturgy of the hours. The liturgy of the hours, also called the breviary, is a spirituality of praying the psalms at various times during the day. It is a spirituality that sisters, brothers, priests and deacons are required to pray, but a lot of lay people enjoy the liturgy of the hours as well. I am especially grateful for the office of readings that allow me to get to know the saints on a more personal level. In book form, the liturgy of the hours is a four book set. Happily, there is now an app for that! So, next time you see me with my iphone, I might not be hunting Pokemons, I could actually be praying!

I am also a big fan of Lectio Divina. You can light a candle, put on soft music in the background, turn down the lights, and just slowly read aloud the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday. After you read it the first time, you can spend five minutes or so meditating on the scripture passage to music or in silence, put yourself into the story, spend time becoming each character in the story.
After a period of meditation, you can read the scripture passage again aloud slowly, repeating the process.

Some people like to come and spend time before the Blessed Sacrament. St. John Vianney loved to spend hours before the Blessed Sacrament. Someone asked him what happens when he sits before the Tabernacle. St. John thought about it and said, “well, I look at Him and He looks back at me!” Sitting in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is a powerful prayer form.

Personally, I am also a big fan of going camping or hiking on my day off when the weather is nice. For me, being in the silence of the forest can help clear the mind and put me in the presence of God. Meanwhile, never underestimate the importance of mealtime prayers, morning and night prayers. Praying in community is typically better than praying individually. Families that pray together, stay together. The little prayers we pray remind us that life is not about me, you, or even us. Life is about our relationship with Jesus Christ, and from that relationship our other relationships in life find their context and meaning.

The most important prayer we celebrate as Catholics, of course, is the Eucharist. Why? The greatest gift we can give to another doesn’t have a hallmark stamp on it, bows or ribbons. The greatest gift we can give to another is the gift of ourselves. In the Eucharist, God in Jesus Christ gives Himself to us, body blood soul and divinity. What an awesome gift. Now, the question becomes, will we offer ourselves to Him in return? Can we offer Him that gift? What a marvelous exchange if we do! He gets our limitations, imperfections, and mortality. We get His redemption, sanctification, and everlasting life. That is what I call a pretty good deal.

Of course, as much as we discuss prayer and spiritual discipline, it is very important to maintain a sense of humor. Jesus has a very serious side to his personality. Unfortunately, some people sadly only believe in a grumpy Jesus. It is clear to me that the Lord had a sense of humor, as we saw in the scriptures today. What that realization means for us is the invitation to remain real in your prayer life with God. Be real, be honest. Don’t be fake. If you are sad, be sad with God. If you are happy, be happy with God. It is Ok to be angry in our prayers or funny in our prayers, God, being omnipotent,
can take whatever we can throw at him. Faith doesn’t consist of empty repetition of prayers to the Deity. Faith is about an authentic relationship with the Holy Trinity.

Which is why Jesus asks us, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” This is a haunting question. “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith?” It is as if the Church is asking us today: What is your faith made of? What is your faith made of? Can you keep your arms raised in prayer, even as the hordes of enemies come attacking against your soul? Can you accept the help of others to support your arms in prayer lest the enemy overtake you? Are you persistent in your prayers to God? Are you real and authentically you when you pray to God, as if God can be fooled by fakery? Are you faithful in good times and in bad in your relationship with God or are you a fair weather disciple? Do we happily dine with the Lord through the last Supper and then desert him in every direction when our faith gets tried? Is your relationship with God about what He can do for you or what you can do for Him? Moses and the Hebrews endured 40 years of spiritual dryness and hardship, can you handle 4 years, 4 months? My friends, being Christian is not for wimps. Discipleship is really hard and challenging at times. Discipleship, as we can all attest, is also extremely rewarding (you might say, the benefits are out of this world!)

Jesus commands us to be persistent in our prayers. Persistence in prayer begins with a close relationship with God and trust that God knows what is best for us. Persistence also takes into consideration that some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers, even when faced with the greatest kinds of hardship. Truth is, everything we experience in this life is a preparation for the next life. That is the context God is working with anyway. Meanwhile, we also know that character should not be defined by how we handle ourselves during the good times but rather in how we carry ourselves (and others) through the bad times. Jesus’ question therefore becomes all the more relevant in good times and in bad, “when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?” The only person who can answer that question is you.