

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Prayer and Persistence”

Fr. Frank Schuster

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. “Moses, for the love of God, keep those arms up!” The moral of both of these stories? Be persistent in prayer! Jesus invites us to be persistent in our prayer life! This message is important because Jesus challenges his disciples with 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 we keep our spiritual arms up in prayer, like Moses, we tend to get the better of the vices inside of us, warring against us. When my prayer life begins to get lax, the battle within the heart can rage all the more. Have you ever noticed that whenever life feels off kilter, our prayer life is usually the first thing to suffer? Persistence in prayer is therefore important, especially when we are having a rough time in 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, and the intercession of the saints to help me. We all do.

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 communicate with us. 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. Reading a little Scripture each day, 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 have a relationship with him.

This 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 our faith made of? Can we keep our arms raised in prayer, even as the hordes of proverbial enemies in life come attacking against our souls? Can we accept the help of others to keep our arms up in prayer so we don’t get defeated in life? Are we faithful in good times and in bad in our relationship with God or are we fair weather disciples? 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 about what you can do for Him? Moses and the Hebrews endured 40 years of spiritual dryness and hardship, can we handle 4 years, 4 months, or 4 minutes?

Jesus therefore commands us to be persistent in our prayers. Persistence in prayer begins with a close relationship with God, love for Sacred Scripture 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, to quote the song by Garth Brooks. And it should also be said that when God says “no” that is an answer too that we simply need to trust. The truth is, everything we experience in this life is a preparation for everlasting life and we simply need to have faith that God knows what is best for us. 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?” Looking at our beautiful parish community and local Church in Western Washington, I for one feel very optimistic. I want to say yes. However, at the end of the day, the only person who can meaningfully answer that question for yourself is you.