

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Exodus 17:8-13 / Luke 18:1-8)
16.10.2022
Prayer

Dear brothers and sisters,

St Dominic founded the contemplative sisters at Prouilhes before the friars. Their mission was to pray for the friars when they were preaching so that their words might touch the minds and hearts of those who listened to them, and bear fruit.

Is this not a good illustration of what we see played out in today's first reading from the Book of Exodus: "As long as Moses kept his arms raised in prayer, Israel had the advantage; when Moses left his arms fall, the advantage went to Amalek, Israel's enemy".

St Benedict writes in the Prologue to his Rule for monks: "Every time you begin a good work, you must pray to Christ the Lord most earnestly to bring it to perfection".

The message from the Scriptures and the Tradition is clear: Prayer matters.

Prayer is not an activity suitable only for children, women or senior citizens. Prayer is not something we have recourse only on the eve of an exam or an interview, or when we are sick. Prayer is not something we practice when we have nothing else to do or just when we feel like doing it.

Prayer is a serious and binding matter. Prayer is of the essence of human life. To pray is a duty for all of us, whatever our situation in life may be. We have to pray in order to allow the Lord enter into our lives, He who is victorious over sin and death and promised to give us a share in his victory. I say that 'we have to allow the Lord enter into our lives', because the Lord does not impose Himself but proposes Himself; the Lord respects our freedom. It is up to us to allow the Lord to act within us and through us. To pray is also to allow God to show us the way forward: what we should do and how to do it. Prayer is what permits all the good we do to bear fruit. We cannot succeed only by the strength of our arm. We have to do our best, but we need God's help to give the final touch to our work which is also God's work. God's help is given us through prayer offered for ourselves and for others.

Prayer is powerful. Let us take an example. To pray when we are sick or for someone who is sick can be a truly powerful thing. Prayer can bring about healing. This was true not only at the time of Jesus, but also in our own day: let us think of what has happened in Lourdes and in so many other places over the years.

Even if it does not operate a physical cure when we are sick, prayer brings us peace of mind and heart. Prayer strengthens our faith and our hope in the truth of our faith that death is not a senseless end but a passage towards fullness of life. Prayer deepens our love for others and invites us to offer our lives for them. When we are sick and are no longer able to do what we used to do, prayer can be source of forgiveness and reconciliation between us and all those around us. How often we witness someone who seems to resist death until one of his or her

children or a person with whom they have been estranged for a long time arrives on the scene. Often this visit permits the dying person to slip away, to enter into death peacefully. How can we not recognize in such a happening a fruit of prayer?

Today's gospel passage asks us to pray with perseverance. To pray is one thing; to persevere in prayer is another. To pray with tears for peace in Ukraine was something quite natural at the beginning of the war. But to continue to pray for peace in Ukraine after several months of war is more difficult. We don't have the same faith and hope six months later than we had on the first day.

Perseverance in prayer requires faith in Jesus, strong faith in Jesus. Is this not exactly what Jesus hints it when he ends his exhortation on perseverance in prayer with these words: "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?"

To persevere in prayer, we need strong faith in Jesus, living hope in him, great love for him. When a man marries a woman or when a woman marries a man, it is not enough for each one of them to tell the other once: "I love you". They have to say "I love you" to one another each and every day of their lives. Their love for one another gives them to persevere in their fidelity to one another today and every day of their lives until the last one. Prayer is always motivated by our love for Christ as a response to God's love for us, and our love for Christ invites us to persevere. The Lord will answer us in his own way, in his own time. He knows what is best for us.

To persevere in prayer is to take time each and every day to listen to the Word of God telling us that He loves us and is with us. It is also for us to tell the Lord that we love Him; it is for us to listen to his word assiduously and to walk the path of life with Him continually.

In the book of Exodus, we read that Aaron and Hur were supporting the arms of Moses raised in prayer. Prayer is an eminently personal act. But if we want to persevere in prayer we need the help of a community, the help of brothers and sisters in the faith, the help of the Church. Prayer is not only about God and me, but about God, me and the Church.

In prayer, we all have to recognize that we stammer. We need help. Let us ask for the help of the Holy Spirit for ourselves and for one another. The Holy Spirit dwells within our hearts where he does not cease to murmur the prayer of Jesus: Abba-Father. Let us make his prayer our own. Let us say to the Lord: "Lord, teach us to pray". Let us listen to Him say to us: When you pray, say: "Our Father".