October 16, 2022—29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

God gave Israel a visible lesson on the power of prayer. Joshua led the army of Israel into battle; Moses went on the mountain to pray for them. If Moses was praying with his hands lifted in prayer, the Israelites won, but when he stopped praying, dropped his hands, they lost. That gesture of Moses has become the gesture of priestly prayer in the Sacred Liturgy. During certain times at Holy Mass the rubrics instruct the priest to lift up his hands just like Moses did.

To persevere in prayer is not easy. I remember how surprised I was when the CCC was issued to find some paragraphs in the 4th part—the section on prayer—titled, “The Battle of Prayer” (#2725). When I thought about it, it made perfect sense. It is easy to pray for a day or two, but to keep it up day after day is a challenge, a battle with ourselves and our priorities. We need to make a commitment to daily prayer and fix it in our schedule; if you pray only when you feel like it, you will not last.

The CCC makes three points about persevering in prayer. First, “**It is always possible to pray** (#2743). We can pray walking or sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee or at your desk when taking a break at work or driving in the car. The best place, however, is in front of the Blessed Sacrament. We have four days when our Church is open for prayer with the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance; many Churches have adoration chapels where you can stop and pray.

Secondly, the CCC teaches that “**Prayer is a vital necessity**”. It goes on to say “**if we do not allow the Spirit to lead us, we fall back into the slavery of sin**” (#2744). Prayer unites my heart to God. He is the one who gives me strength during temptation and sufferings and the battle with my own human weakness. Without prayer I have no defense against evil.

Finally, “**Prayer and Christian life are inseparable**” (#2745). Prayer is conversation with God and it enables me to get to know Him as a Father and Friend. Without prayer, I will not be able to love God and love my neighbor as Jesus commanded.

In the parable, Jesus used simple logic to teach us the need for perseverance in prayer. He spoke about the widow who asks the unjust judge for justice and does not give up until he renders justice. This judge doesn’t act out of justice, but reasons: “**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.**” Jesus makes the point that if an unjust judge finally gives into the desire of the widow, how much more will our Heavenly Father who loves us and wants the best for us, answer quickly.

We often complain that God doesn’t hear our prayers. St. James points out “**You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions**” (James 4:4). Many times, our prayers are just for selfish things and yet we expect God to give them to us simply because we want them and then get mad at Him because we don’t receive them. Our petitions should always include, Thy will be done.

There are three responses that God can give to our needs and prayers. First, there are many graces and blessings that God gives to us without asking Him. They come from His Fatherly care and goodness of heart. For example, we all woke up this morning with the possibility of doing good today. If nothing else, you worshipped the Most Holy Trinity with your brothers and sisters in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass today. That is truly the greatest gift from God if we understand the meaning of the Holy Eucharist.

Second, there are some graces and blessings that God will give to you only if you ask for them. If you don’t ask, you won’t receive them. Although God knows our needs and is the Giver of all good things, our role in life is not merely passive. He wants us to play an active part in our salvation and that of others.

Finally, I hate to say it, but there are some prayers that God will answer with a “No”. We might think, this is truly a good thing that I am praying for, like the conversion of a sinner or an end to abortion. If God is good, why doesn’t He answer this prayer? Always remember, that God will not violate the free will of another, even if that person does evil. The very essence of love is that we must be able to say no to God, otherwise we are just robots. Often, I want God to take the freedom away of someone else to stop them from evil, but I don’t want God to take away my freedom to sin. I want to keep on being able to do evil in my own little ways.

God wants us to ask Him for what we need, but the real purpose of prayer is not to change the mind of God to what I want, but to change my mind to what God wants. When I persevere in prayer, the Holy Spirit will give me wisdom and help me to see things as God sees them. He will lift me up from a worldly view.

This last line of this Gospel has always frightened to me. “**When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?**” I know that it is easy to fall away from the faith and give into the devil and his minions. The things and pleasures of the world are always pulling at us. However, I couldn’t see how the world could go so far away from God that Jesus would question whether anyone would have faith when He comes at the end of time. Until now. I keep thinking the immorality and corruption can’t get worse and then it does!

Even though this question of Jesus is frightening, we must have the courage to remain faithful, even if everyone else doesn’t. We cannot give up or the devil has won. His greatest weapons are fear and despair. Jesus has won by His death and resurrection, and He will win completely since He is God. Amazingly, Jesus has given His holy and humble Mother a particular role in this battle to defeat the proud and fallen angel. She promised at Fatima that in the end her Immaculate Heart would triumph. Let’s persevere in prayer with Mary.