

**“How to Pray Always, Without Becoming Weary”  
Homily for White Mass, Diocese of Phoenix  
29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year “C”**

**Introduction**

Your Excellency, Bishop Olmsted, Bishop Nevares, Reverend Fathers and Deacon, dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is an honor for me to be with you today and deliver this homily for your annual White Mass. I am grateful to Bishop Olmsted for the invitation to do so, and I take this opportunity to express my thanks to you all as well, for the very important work that you do in sharing the love and healing power of Jesus Christ to those who are suffering in very immediate, perceptible ways.

The words we just heard from St. Paul to his collaborator and protégé, St. Timothy, provide very timely, sound advice to us now even 2,000 years later: “[T]he sacred Scriptures ... are capable of giving ... wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Yes, this is precisely the wisdom we need to live our faith and attain salvation in this post-modern age.

**The What and the Why**

Notice how St. Paul is very clear here as to what we are to do: “Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed.” “Remain faithful”: the fidelity of Christians is challenged in every age. God, in fact, seems to have quite a penchant for challenging His people! Every age and place presents its particular challenges, and perhaps ours are not that different from where St. Timothy was ministering in his own time. In the verses right before the passage we heard proclaimed, St. Paul speaks of how the moral depravity and false teaching that will be rampant in the last days were already at work then. He pulls no punches in calling out the evils of the last days, which he acknowledges are already present: “People will be self-centered and lovers of money, proud, haughty, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious, callous, implacable, slanderous, licentious, brutal, hating what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, as they make a pretense of religion but deny its power” (2 Tm 3:2–5). Very strong words indeed!

Perhaps we long for a time when it was easier, but St. Paul won’t let us off the hook. We must take heed of what he tells Timothy, and us: “proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage.” This is what we are supposed to

do, no matter how difficult it may be, and certainly these words seem to be especially appropriate to our own age.

So, what we are called to do is clear, which, again, is what Christians are called to do in every age and place – each one comes with its own unique challenges, some perhaps greater than others. But in addition to telling us *what* we are supposed to do, St. Paul also gives us the reason *why* we are to do it: “because you know from whom you learned it,” that is, “the sacred Scriptures, which are capable for giving ... wisdom through faith in Christ Jesus.” The sacred Scriptures are the word of God, and so is Jesus Christ, God’s Word made flesh. What we have learned is the truth of God’s word, the truth that *is* God’s Word. We know this from Jesus Christ himself.

The question is, then, do we really believe it? Do we really believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that his word is truth? It is really, then, a question of trust and conviction: do we really trust that Jesus Christ tells us the truth, that he *is* the truth and is the Word of God? Do we believe this to the point that we will keep *his* word, his word as he gives it to us, and not distort it to fit it into our own comfortable mold, as we would like it to be?

### **The How**

Yes, the what and the why are very clear here. But then there is the question that remains lingering out there: *how?* *How* do we do this? How especially do we do this in light of St. Paul’s very challenging command to “be persistent *whether it is convenient or inconvenient*” (considering, that is, that persistence in keeping his word inviolate seems to be much more inconvenient nowadays than anytime in living memory)? For the answer to this question, we need to look to the other two readings.

Actually, we find the answer right there at the beginning of the Gospel passage we just heard proclaimed. This is the introduction St. Luke gives to the parable of our Lord that he is about to recount to us: “Jesus told his disciples a parable about *the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.*” Now, to “pray always” doesn’t mean we must spend all day, every day, in church. “Always” here means to pray in the sense of praying diligently or frequently. We use that sort of poetic exaggeration in our own colloquial speech, such as, “he’s always working very hard” or, “she’s always studying.” We know this is not meant in the literal sense. That’s what the “always” means, but the “pray” also means more than time alone

communicating with God, although that for sure is the essence of it. But anything done for the glory of God, especially properly motivated acts of charity, can be considered a form of prayer.

Clearly, read in the light of this Gospel reading, the first reading the Church gives us this Sunday is for the purpose of underscoring this necessity of praying always. The example given in this passage from Exodus may seem a bit shocking to us: “Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” This certainly would not seem to be in the spirit of kindness, let alone in keeping with the Gospel precept of love of one’s enemies. There are, of course, explanations for this – God’s word needing to be expressed according to the mentality and limitations of the given culture of the time, and so forth – but this is not the place for a lecture on Biblical exegesis. For our own purposes today, we can take away from this story the deeper spiritual interpretation, in which the Amalekites – the enemies of God’s people – represent the presence and activity of evil in the world. And yes, we must fight against evil, we must fight spiritually.

The Church has always understood the reality of spiritual warfare, and that we must be on guard and strengthen ourselves spiritually to resist the temptations and incursions of the evil one. In one of his sermons, Pope St. Gregory the Great said the following: “To advance against the foe involves a bold resistance to the powers of this world in defense of the flock. To stand fast in battle on the day of the Lord means to oppose the wicked enemy out of love for what is right.” So, yes, let’s not fool ourselves: each of us is in a struggle – in combat, if you will – for our own soul, fighting to overcome the forces of evil, temptation, mediocrity, moral compromise. Anyone who sincerely strives to make progress in the path of self-perfection knows this, and experiences it.

### **Faith and Prayer**

Notice, though, the complete lesson the Lord teaches us in this Gospel passage, and which the Church is driving home to us in this Mass: the necessity of praying always *without becoming weary*. We become weary if we are inclined to stop praying because we do not feel the effect: not sensing the inner peace we are seeking; not growing in virtue such as becoming more patient, or curbing bad habits such as gossiping; not perceiving an answer to our prayers such that there seems to be no improvement in what we are praying for; not sensing a greater presence of God or deeper spiritual experience.

However, when we approach prayer with this mentality, we are doing so on our own terms, not God’s, expecting God to act in a certain way and according to our own timetable. This means we pray in order to “get something out of it” – essentially, giving to get. And this is diametrically opposed to the Christian spirit, is it not? But if we pray simply because we love God, then we will not become weary. When you really love someone, you naturally want to be with them. You don’t spend time with them in order to get them to do something for you – that is, if you truly love them. Rather, you simply want to be in their presence.

Praying in order to “get something out of it” is a trick of the evil one. He wants us to grow weary and give up praying, because – one might say – if you don’t pray, you are easy prey. So how do we persevere? Yes, pray motivated by the love of God, but, on the human level, what must we do?

Notice what happened when Moses became weary, and could no longer hold up his arms on his own: others came to support him. We cannot persevere in prayer, we cannot be persistent in faith even when inconvenient, all on our own: it can only happen if we keep communion with the Church. Love is naturally a movement that goes beyond itself; to love God all in isolation, the love will dry up. So it is always within the communion of the Church, being observant and diligent in our religious duties, in fellowship with our fellow believers, keeping that faith intact has it has been handed down to us through the Church, that we can persevere in prayer without growing weary.

## **Conclusion**

If you noticed, there is something very curious about this Gospel passage, at least the way it is extracted for proclamation in the liturgical assembly. This is the only Gospel passage designated for Mass that ends with a question: “But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” This sounds, and feels, unusual. There is no resolution, it leaves us hanging. What is the answer? Actually, St. Luke gives us the answer in that opening verse to this passage, the verse with which he frames this whole story, which is the very point of the parable our Lord teaches here.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? He will if we pray, and only if we pray.