

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

In our first reading today, we hear the familiar story of how Moses prayed to the Lord with his arms raised while Joshua and his men fought the Amalekites. When Moses grew fatigued and lowered his arms – which signifies growing weary of praying – the Amalekites had the upper hand, but when Moses continued to pray with his arms raised, the Israelites would prevail. Naturally holding one's arms up can quickly grow tiring, and so Aaron and Hur helped Moses by holding his arms up while he prayed. And in the end, Joshua and the Israelites prevailed over the Amalekites.

I think a little context can be helpful in making this story even more meaningful. Sometimes all these different enemies that Israel fights throughout the Old Testament can all kind of seem the same. It can be easy to not pay attention to the details or the background,

but they can make a difference in helping us understand these stories on a deeper level.

So: Moses and the Israelites of course have fled slavery in Egypt. The Lord had promised to give them a “land flowing with milk and honey” – the land of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, their forefathers. But between Egypt and the Promised Land lay the desert wilderness of the Sinai peninsula, where they wandered for 40 years. The story we heard in today’s reading takes place not long after the Lord has delivered them from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. But even though those enemies have been eliminated and are no longer a threat, new ones arise along the way, and now the Israelites are faced with the threat from a people who live in Sinai: the Amalekites.

The Amalekites become aware of this large group of people moving across their territory and see them as a threat. So they start to go after the weakest among the Israelites; that is, the slowest and

the ones who straggle behind the rest: the elderly and the sick, the families with lots of young children. But then the Amalekites assemble their soldiers and attack the Israelites as a whole, and that is the battle that takes place in our first reading. The Israelites are in great peril: if they are defeated, it will be the end of them as a people. So this is a major threat that they face.

While Joshua and his men engage the Amalekites in battle, Moses is on a mountaintop praying and, as we heard, Aaron and Hur help him to pray to the Lord by literally holding up his arms. We learn from this the importance of prayer as well as of persevering in prayer. We might wonder: couldn't God have just made the Amalekites go away, or defeated them on His own? Why was it necessary for Moses to pray so long like this for them to be defeated? We might wonder the same thing for ourselves: can't God just smooth the way for us, take away our problems, help us overcome the difficulties we face in life (or better yet, not even let us

face them in the first place)? This is part of the mystery of God and how He chooses to let us cooperate with Him in His plan of salvation and in His mysterious designs on the world. In His goodness, he lets us intercede with Him for our own sake and for the sake of others.

Prayer is necessary; there is no other way around it. God uses our prayer in his own mysterious way which is unknown to us to act in this world and to bring about good in it. It can't be said that our prayer somehow makes God change His mind, but He does use it in some way. However, it *can* be said that our prayer changes us, and conforms us more and more to the Lord.

And just as Moses had to continue to pray and with his arms raised in supplication to the Lord for the battle to favor the Israelites, so too must we persevere in prayer. We can never let up on it or abandon it. When we do, trouble will surely follow. We will only be worse off if we stop praying, or if we don't pray in the first place.

Every spiritual writer of any worth has said the same thing over and over: that prayer – and daily prayer – are necessary. We hear another example of this in our Gospel reading, when Jesus tells his disciples a parable about a corrupt government official who, as it says in the Gospel, “neither feared God nor respected any human being.” But even though he didn’t fear God and didn’t care about anyone, he gave the old widow what she wanted, not out of the goodness of his heart, but because he wanted her to leave him alone! And Jesus then contrasts the judge with God, who, unlike the corrupt judge, is all good, all just, and all loving. He loves us and desires what is truly for our good. He doesn’t answer our prayers because he gets weary of us and wants us to stop bothering him, but out of love, from the depths of his infinite love for us. Of course, He knows better than we do what is truly best for us: sometimes we might perceive that this or that thing or outcome as what is best for us and for others, but in God’s plan it may not be.

Again we hear the importance of prayer and of persevering in it. We all need it, no matter who we are or where we are in life; not matter our background, income, job, whatever: prayer is necessary; it is vital for our spiritual health. And that means daily prayer. We are all engaged, whether we realize it or not, in a battle in life: a spiritual battle. There might be people in our lives who we perceive as enemies, but our real enemies are not other human beings but rather principalities and powers. What do I mean? I mean that there are fallen angels who do not desire our good nor our eternal happiness; it is they who are our true enemies. If we do not pray to the Lord every day, our spiritual enemies will sooner or later prevail over us, just as the Amalekites would prevail over the Israelites whenever Moses grew weary of praying. But if we persevere in prayer, God will surely triumph over these spiritual enemies.

Again, we all must pray, because whose life is easy? Who does not face struggles in life: the struggles that come from living in a

fallen world harmed by sin, living under the shadow of death, and dealing with the struggles that come from temptation and our own human weakness. And just as Aaron and Hur supported Moses' arms so that he would not grow weary of interceding with the Lord for his people, we must also support one another in prayer. Because, again, whose life is easy? There are times when we all grow weary, when it becomes difficult to pray, when we are not at our best. So we must intercede for one another in prayer.

God gives us a choice: to pray or not to pray. He doesn't force us to pray. But only one choice leads to eternal life. While we must take action in life, just as Joshua took action by physically fighting the enemies of Israel, we also must take time every day to pray, because it is only God who can prevail over our spiritual enemies. It's very easy to make excuses to not pray: I don't have the time; I'm too busy; I'm too tired; I get distracted constantly; I don't see any results. Let's stop making excuses and be serious about having consistent, regular

prayer lives, putting prayer first every day, making prayer the priority in our day, especially over the many trivialities that often confront us. And God in his infinite goodness will hear us and will lead us to the ultimate victory of eternal life with Him.

- **October 19, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**