

Homily for September 17 & 18, 2016
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: Amos 8:4-7
2nd Reading: Timothy 2:1-8
Gospel: Luke 16:1-13

“I ask that prayers be offered for everyone”

Our second reading today, from St. Paul’s letter to Timothy, speaks to us about prayer. It’s a reminder that, as believers in God, prayer is our most basic, most essential endeavor; it’s a fundamental component of the Christian life. Without prayer we can’t survive spiritually. Prayer is what we do, it’s how we express our love for God; it’s how we offer our praise to God; it’s how we thank God for all His many blessings; it’s how we plead to our Almighty Father for our needs and desires; it’s how we express sorrow for our sins and failings; it’s how we beg for God’s forgiveness and mercy. Prayer is the door we open to enter into intimate communion with God. But, do we pray enough?

St. Paul instructed the Thessalonians to pray constantly (1 Thess 5:17). Yet, many of us find prayer difficult. Unless we have an urgent need we might even put prayer at the end of our “to do” list. Furthermore, when we do take a few minutes to pray, other thoughts often distract us. That’s why Jesus told us that when we pray we should go to our room and close the door. Setting aside a particular time of day to be alone with Jesus can also make our prayer life more fulfilling.

Tragically, prayer is under attack today in all regions of the world. More and more we see public prayer being ridiculed or even forbidden. No longer are players allowed to pray before a sports contest. Public school teachers must never encourage students to pray, or even have a moment of silence before

class. Plaques bearing words of prayer, once symbols of America's gratitude to God, are no longer publicly displayed. The very nature of prayer is challenged everywhere we look. So we need to protect and defend our right to publicly praise God at every opportunity.

Two weeks ago we celebrated the canonization of St. Teresa of Calcutta. There are many stories about this amazing woman who spent her whole life caring for the poorest of the poor. A humble nun who worked in the filthiest, most miserable conditions imaginable in order to offer peace to the dying, to treat the sick, to give comfort to the suffering. A young priest once prayed the rosary with her, and when they finished, he spontaneously asked, "Mother Teresa, what is your secret?" She looked at him with a twinkle in her eye and replied, "That's very simple: I pray." Like all Christians, Mother Teresa found strength and sustenance through prayer. It brought her close to Christ and helped her know Him in a personal way.

In this letter to Timothy, St. Paul teaches that prayers must be offered for everyone, not just Christians and not just friends or family members. Rather, we are to pray for the oppressed, for the needy, for the salvation of all mankind throughout the world.

St. Paul especially recommends that people pray for "kings" and all in authority. He tells us that we should pray in a special way for those who lead us so that—in St. Paul's own words— "*we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.*" The timing of this message couldn't be better, because in just 51 days, eligible American voters will exercise their constitutional right to elect leaders to fill a variety of political offices, including the highest office in the country: the Presidency of the United States.

This is perhaps the most important election in a generation and the results will likely determine the direction our country will take for decades to come. As citizens we have a responsibility to become familiar with each candidate's views on the problems our country faces and to insure that they will represent our needs and our civic values. As Catholics we must be especially aware of every candidate's positions on moral and religious values, especially the protection of the life of the most vulnerable: the pre-born and the elderly. So do these leaders and potential leaders need our prayers? You bet they do!

At the same time, we need to pray for ourselves, for the wisdom and courage to vote for the best candidate for each of the various offices. We need to pray for God's guidance when making our choices.

Prayer is a gift from God; it's an invitation to leave the world for a few minutes, to reach out and to touch God—and to allow God to touch us! Prayer is a two-way conversation with God. Yes, we speak to God—and He speaks to us. Prayer changes us and prepares us to receive God's grace. Through prayer, God helps us to know ourselves better and to live our lives more faithfully and more fully. St. John Chrysostom wrote, "For it is impossible, utterly impossible, for the man who prays eagerly and invokes God ceaselessly ever to sin."

At times we might question whether God hears our prayers because we don't see immediate results. Perhaps time is needed to prepare our souls for the graces God will give us. Or some delay may be God's way of testing us. Or maybe He has something much greater in mind for us. Either way, our Heavenly Father knows what's best for us so we need to be patient and to fully trust in Him. Again, St. John Chrysostom tells us that nothing is equal to

prayer; for what is impossible, it makes possible; what is difficult it makes easy.

God expects us to be persistent in our prayers. We remember how St. Monica prayed for years that her son, Augustine, would be converted to Catholicism and away from his sinful life. She never gave up. Eventually, her prayers were answered beyond her wildest dreams. Augustine not only converted, but also became a saint and one of the great doctors of the Church. So we never know how God will answer our prayers, but we can be sure every one of our prayers are heard and will be answered.

Jesus promised: ***“Ask and you shall receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who ask, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”***

(Luke 11:9-10)

Amen.