

October 20, 2019
Twenty-Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Most of you know our seminarian, Brody Stewart and that he attends Mt. Angel Seminary in Oregon, which is run by Benedictine monks. What you might not know is that Brody loves to play soccer and is on the seminary soccer team. The other day, Brody shared with me that Abbot Jeremy came to watch the seminarians play a very competitive soccer match with another team. While he was there, he held up his hands like Moses who held up his hands while Israel was in battle in today's reading from the Book of Exodus. The seminarians scored a goal! Then Abbot had to leave. That goal turned out to be their only one and the seminarians lost the game.

It might sound strange, even suppositious to us that Moses could control the power of God over Israelite's battle against Amalek or maybe just a playful joke that Abbot Jeremy's raised hands helped the seminarians to score a goal. However, the story of Exodus is about the serious business of faith and prayer. If we were in the position of the Israelites, who believed that their human power alone had a poor chance to defeat Amalek, wouldn't you too turn to God? Wouldn't you do whatever you could to call down the power of God over the battle that they were certain to lose? Where would we be if Amalek had destroyed Moses and the people of Israel? Rather, God demonstrated to the people of Israel that he was the one, true God through Moses and with the help of Aaron and Hur. "Joshua mowed down Amalek and all his people with the edge of the sword." (Ex. 17:13) A decisive victory, one much like their victory over Pharaoh, his chariots and charioteers. More importantly, this story in Exodus points to Jesus and his victory over sin and death on the cross. With proper Biblical faith, we will make that connection. Moses is God's chosen one, an instrument of God's help to the people in the time of need. His upraised hands y symbolize a posture of complete reliance on God and to Jesus when he extended his hands extended on the cross as the ultimate act of faith in his heavenly Father.

What does it mean for us when we put the message of Exodus today, the message of a decisive victory of God, and the message of Jesus today to “pray always without becoming weary”? (Lk: 18:1)

The first is to admit that prayer can make us weary! Jesus would not have brought it up unless it were a struggle for the people of God. Moses could not keep praying with his hands raised without the help of Aaron and Hur. We know that disciples fell asleep when Jesus asked them to pray with him during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. How many times have we tried to pray and we just fell asleep or it seemed that we just didn't have the strength, the desire to keep going. Jesus knows and understands this so he encourages us not to give up, especially when God seems to be taking his own sweet time to answer our prayers. Jesus uses the example of the widow going to the unjust judge to teach us what he means about have persistence in prayer. Moses and the people of Israel knew that they were helpless without God's help and that is exactly the position of the widow. Women in general and widows in particular had no influence in ancient Jewish society. When a man died, his property didn't go to the widow, it went to his sons or brothers. To be a widow meant to be poor. The attitude needed for persistent prayer is one of poverty. Spiritual poverty was the attitude of Moses, spiritual poverty was the way Jesus lived his entire life. When we live our lives in imitation of Jesus we realize that have nothing without God, we are nothing without God. God is everything; we depend completely upon him. Our society, on the other hand, wants us to believe that we have control over our lives and God, if you believe in him is a good backup in case you get in trouble. We need to do our part. Moses lifted up his hands in prayer, the widow persisted in her petition for justice and Jesus gave his life on the cross. We do all we can and first, before anything, we have faith that God will act. God will act, but not always in the way we expect. God will act but not always according to our timeframe.

Prayer for the mature Christian is serious business. Jesus asks, “when the son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” That answer depend upon if we pray always without becoming weary.