

29th Sunday- C 2016

Deacon Pat Hall

EX 17:8-13, 43-52; PS 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; 2 TM 3:14-4:2; LK 18:1-8

Homilies are vehicles for opening the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/101616.cfm>

Help.

Such a simple word... yet it can contain a world of meaning and a world of emotion. You know so from your own life:

"Hey, help... can you pass me that wrench?"

"Hey, can I get any help around here?"

"Oh, I don't know what to do; I'm beyond all help."

Or how about the help shouted from a dark alley?

You can feel the emotions in these pleas.

But of course, there is help in offering:

May I help you?

Help is heere!

Or how about what we repeated over and over during the psalm:

My help is from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

All our efforts at help are grounded in the Lord's help. When we forget that, we get into trouble. To do it on our own is what got us tossed from the Garden of Eden.

While we are called to be His instruments, it is God's power and grace that is delivered.

Moses certainly realized that our help is from the Lord. An armed and trained army was sent out to face the Amaleks. There is no little effort in hand-to-hand combat. Loss there meant loss of one's life. The defeat of the army could mean no quarter given and being utterly mowed down, eliminated from being able to defend family at home.

Moses knew their survival was dependent on the Lord and so from the top of the hill he raised his hands up, much as Fr. James raises his hands in the open *Orans* at the altar in plea and supplication before our Lord.

And yet even our spiritual actions are not the work of one man, but of a community, a people, as demonstrated by the support Aaron and Hur provided Moses in keeping his hands raised. Do we not provide the same support in our prayerful participation with Fr. James as we celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass?

It was Moses' faith and the support he received that gave him the strength to persevere in his prayer.

In the pastoral letter to Timothy, we hear the community being exhorted to be persistent in that faith, to have confidence in the faith that they had known from their youth, found in Scripture and received from Jesus Christ. This faith assures salvation and calls all to proclaim and share the faith that had been received.

It is this persistence born in faith that we see the widow who ultimately receives justice by her relentless bothering of the unjust judge.

A couple of translation notes is helpful in understanding the desperation from which the widow came, and the formidable challenge of which she faced.

The Hebrew word for widow is also translated as "the silent one". And the Greek word for striking comes from boxing and more literally translates as "giving a black eye". Ancient Hebrews understood "giving a black eye" metaphorically much as we do when we insult or shame someone... or maybe the unjust judge was literally afraid of being socked in the eye!ⁱ I wouldn't put it past Jesus' sense of humor to allow the double entendre.

But, here is a widow, a powerless silent one who only has her voice to plea to an unjust judge who freely admits he knows no shame- there is nothing in his shameful nature to which one could appeal.ⁱⁱ And yet in faith, perseverance prevails.

Jesus then of course points to the providential love of our Father on which we can place our confidence, our hope and our very lives. It was with such confidence that Jesus went through the Garden of Gethsemane and onwards to Calvary with the assurance of the Resurrection, a resurrection towards which we all hope and aspire.

I have been humbled to see such perseverance in action. You provide me with the resources so that St. Mary's can reach out in need. Yet, I do not do so on my own. At the Eastside food pantry, I have almost 10% of the St. Mary's families represented by our volunteers each Monday night. You would be proud of the loving, patient and tender care they provide to those who come for food.

You would also be inspired by the stories of those who have found themselves to be in such a desperate situation as having to have to come to a food pantry for sustenance. While some are downcast and beaten, it continually surprises me how many express joy and deep faith in the providence of our Father and the love of Jesus. Their joy is such that the presence of the Holy Spirit is palpable.

There is another place that I experience the palpable presence of the Spirit due to a people's perseverance in faith. That is right here at St. Mary's.

We have come through many trials. Some may have felt that it was like battling the

Amaleks. It might have felt like blood-letting.

And yet, look at this parish today. While I am not proclaiming any finish-line success, one can see the joy that is expressed and the confidence we have in the love of God.

I even had to change my customary parking spot next to the playground. There were so many children playing there after Mass I was becoming afraid of running over some little toes.

Last Thursday, we had a few dozen neighborhood children come through our Gilbert Street gate for a Literacy Obstacle Course: a gathering of families over food, fun and literacy. They are coming to find St. Mary's to be a visible sign of hope.

This perseverance comes from faith and faith from prayer.

It is this faith that the Lord shares... and searches for:

"But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

St. Augustine said:

(ut sup.) Our Lord adds this to shew, that when faith fails, prayer dies.

In order to pray then, we must have faith,

and that our faith fail not, we must pray.

Faith pours forth prayer,

and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith."ⁱⁱⁱ

My help is from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Help. Such a simple word and yet through which so much joy is poured out through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

ⁱ *The Relentless Widow*, John Shea p. 290

ⁱⁱ *ibed*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Catena Aurlea*, St. Augustine, <http://amzn.to/2dW04Sx>