

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of persistent prayer. They show that only those who open up to God with patience and perseverance can come to an answer to their prayer. They also invite us to cultivate the virtues of patience and perseverance in our relationship with the Lord.

The first reading is related to the situation of Israel at the crossing to the holy land. It describes in particular one of the battles they had with Amalek. It shows that while Moses and his aides were up the mountain to pray to God for victory, Joshua was in the field to fight.

But, as Moses was praying with his hands raised up, he could not sustain that position the whole period long. It turned out, then, that the more his hands were lifted up, the more the Israelites were winning the combat. In the same way, the more he let his arms down because of tiredness, the more they were losing the combat. In order to remedy that situation and, thereby to have victory, his aides, Aaron and Hur, supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other.

What is behind this text is the idea that persistent prayer obtains for us from God the blessing we cannot achieve with our own strength. Another idea is the truth that when we stop praying and persevering, we run the risk of being defeated by the evil one.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus tells the parable of the wicked judge and the poor widow. In fact, the Gospel starts with Jesus' invitation to his disciples to pray always without becoming weary.

In order to apply his saying to the reality, Jesus gives a parable in which he tells the story of a judge who was disrespectful of God as well as of human beings. As there was a widow who often came to him to ask for justice against her adversary, he did not care at all. But because the widow kept on coming to the point of bothering him, he eventually ended up by listening to her and delivering a decision for her case.

Finally, Jesus says that in the same way, God will not be slow to respond to those who call upon him days and nights and to secure their rights before him. In the end, he asks the question to know if at his return the son of man will find faith on earth.

What do we learn from this Gospel? What I want to highlight today is the importance of faith and perseverance. The fact that Jesus invites the disciples to pray without becoming weary is an evident sign that perseverance and persistence play a big role in prayer.

In order to understand the point of Jesus, we have to bear in mind that perseverance presupposes that things do not follow automatically as wished, that there are difficulties and obstacles that someone has to transcend with tenacity before obtaining what he wants. That is why perseverance implies, in addition to persistence and insistence, waiting with patience for the fulfillment of what we are looking for.

Those attitudes are what Jesus wants us to have in our prayer. Those attitudes are exemplified in the parable by the way the widow behaves vis-à-vis the indifferent Judge. She was not discouraged and did not give up until she got what she wanted. In insisting, she overcame the resistance of the judge and obtained justice for her case.

The fact that the widow got what she wanted only after insistence and perseverance shows that God has his time to intervene in our problems and to respond to our prayer. What he wants is only that we persevere and continue knocking at his door whatever might be the time it takes.

In that sense, perseverance is important in our relationship with God, as well as it is a key factor to the success of any human endeavor. After all, it is only those who persevere who can succeed in what they undertake. All those who like the easy life, are impatient and discouraged at the least of difficulties they meet, and in their way will never succeed.

This point is very important, because in a culture that likes quick results and fast services, people are always in hurry. When it comes to waiting a little bit for what they want or there is delay in what they desire, people become easily impatient and nervous. Some even renounce the pursuit of looking for what they wanted and put off for tomorrow what they would have done that day.

And yet, God does not always play the same card as we do. He may delay things to happen to us for good reasons we do not know. He may delay his answer to our prayer so that we may give him everything we are. At times, he may reserve the answer to our prayer for later in order to keep us safe and on the right paths. After all, only God sees time wholly and entirely, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run and when it can happen to us. That is why Jesus said that we should never be discouraged in prayer.

In that perspective, waiting with patience is very important. But it means also that waiting is a time of trial where we have to remain persevering and faithful to our commitments in spite of the delay. That is why Jesus is asking if human faith will stand the long delays before the Son of Man comes back. Will the Son of Man find faith on earth, asks Jesus? That is the challenge to which each one of us is confronted, namely to be able to keep our faith alive and intact until Jesus comes back, even if meanwhile we do not have the immediate answer to our prayers.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to persevere in our prayer and commitment until the day of his return. Let us ask him the grace of faithfulness in the waiting of the fulfillment of his promise. May God bless you all!

Exodus 17: 8-13; 2Timothy 3:14-4: 2; Luke 18: 1-8



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