

## THE FAITH OF PERSISTENCE; OCTOBER 20, 2019

The Israelites only win their fights in the Old Testament when their trust in God is evidenced such that they depend primarily upon him for victory. In the lesson from Exodus this week this is made clear: Joshua only has success against the army of Amalek as long as Moses is steadfast in prayer. As the day drags on and Moses grows tired, his arms droop and the campaign lags. At these times it is necessary for Hur and Aaron to prop him up so that his prayer continues and God remains with them. Jesus too, though using a different example, exhorts his disciples to be continual and unflagging in their prayer.

Why? Doesn't God hear us the first time? What is being demonstrated however doesn't really have much to do with God and his receptivity but rather with ourselves and whether or not we have the faith needed to continue in our vigilance for hearing God's answer. You see, most of the time that people stop praying, it's not because they grow tired but because they have come to believe that God will not answer their prayer. Or worse still, that he isn't there at all. Most of us are both very impatient and weak of faith. If God doesn't answer us quickly we presume he won't. This presumption is born of a lack of tested faith and a childish view of expectations. We want what we want and that *tout suite*.

Frustration in prayer is inevitable when we know neither how to pray nor what to ask for. Our view of justice or of righting wrongs is often pedestrian and self-centered. But the truth is that many, if not most, injustices in human life are not set immediately right or even at all in this life. Think here of our recent parable concerning Lazarus and the rich man. In the only "end" that matters, things are very much set in order: Lazarus is to enjoy an eternal beatitude not available to the formerly rich man now

mired in the flames of his narcissism. The need for persistent prayer then is a call for a deepening of faith in God's ultimate design for human salvation and transformation. Blessed Anna waits and prays over eighty years until the Lord Jesus appears as promised in the Temple, carried in the arms of his parents.

Paul very much had this connection in mind when rendering his advice to his disciple Timothy. To the newly minted Bishop of Ephesus, Paul reminds him to pray continually through his persistent proclamation of the Word. The Word is proclaimed efficaciously in the only manner it can be – in faith and trust. Such an action is incumbent not just upon bishops, but upon all of the baptized. My brothers, in the end, we persist in the prayer of evangelization only if and only to the extent that we have faith that God will ultimately answer us through the changing of hearts and the transformation of souls. First, of course, our own. Power is granted to every Catholic through our reception of the Eucharist to accomplish just that. The Eucharist, through which we give continual thanks, is most assuredly God's greatest answer to prayer.