

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCE ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
NATIONAL SHRINE OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II, WASHINGTON, DC  
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2019**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his spiritual closeness and paternal affection. I greet you as the Feast Day of Saint John Paul II draws near, knowing how so many people continue to venerate him as an Apostle of peace, an outstanding missionary, a champion of freedom, and an ardent supporter of young people.

First and foremost, Saint John Paul II was a man of prayer. He began his day in prayer and silence before the Lord. He spent countless hours on his knees, even in his old age, immersed in prayer. Today's readings speak of the need to persevere in prayer. The first line of the Gospel tells us that we *ought always to pray and not lose heart.* (Luke 18:1) Jesus wants His disciples to transform the world, but the world is not transformed by programs; rather, the power that transforms our world into the Kingdom of God is faith, of which prayer is an expression.

Faith, which is a gift from God, but which also manifests itself in a longing for God in prayer, has the power to move the heart of God. In prayer, we come before God as beggars, and He in His goodness and mercy looks upon us with kindness. Our poverty and persistence in prayer penetrate His Heart. The posture of prayer before God is also one of hope. Hope is the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. Hope orders the aspirations of men and women, not to the domination and control of others or the pursuit of worldly goods, but to the pursuit of the Kingdom of heaven. The virtue of hope sustains us even during times of abandonment and discouragement.

At the conclusion of today's Gospel, Jesus asks His disciples a question that rightly ought to disturb us: "*When the Son of Man comes will He find faith on earth?*" Today, we are faced with a situation in which we know many people who have fallen away from the faith, or who are experiencing a crisis of faith, or who have, because of their situation in life, have lost hope, believing that God does not hear them or has abandoned them. It might even be that we ourselves despair and think this way.

The scriptures encourage us. In the Gospel, Jesus uses the example of the persistent widow to teach us not to give up. She is one of the lowly people of the earth, who remains tenacious in her desire to attain her goal. But if she can obtain justice from a dishonest judge, should we not take great confidence that we might receive justice – and even more – from the Almighty Father who loves us? Faith assures us that God hears our prayers and grants them at the appropriate moment, even though sometimes our daily experiences might suggest otherwise.

Again, in this Shrine, I would invite you to reflect upon how John Paul II, even from his youth during the time of the Nazis or later during the communist period, persevered in prayer that his people might be free. During the long years of suffering and darkness, he focused on the light of Christ, and, in God's time and at the proper time, the Solidarity Movement was born; the Berlin Wall fell; and millions of people were freed from oppressive regimes that tried to erase God and tried also to erase man, made in His image.

We need to persevere in prayer, and this perseverance also pertains to our need to cry out continually to God for mercy. John Paul II wrote *Dives in misericordia*, emphasizing the Father's Mercy. Pope Francis too has not ceased to speak about mercy during his Pontificate. Indeed, if the power to change our world comes from faith in God, then we must be persistent in our cry for mercy. God cannot change things without our conversion, and if our hearts really desire His Mercy, then we must beg for forgiveness. Again, how could the loving Father not hear and answer the cry of his child? Our own experience of mercy, just like the freedom of so many in the Christian East which came about through non-violence, is a reminder that faith and love are stronger than hatred, violence, and death.

The first reading testifies to this also. The Israelites are fighting with the Amalekites. The key to the Israelites victory was not their military might, their weapons, or the number of men; rather, it was faith, directed to the one true God, that brought them victory. As Joshua and his men engaged in battle, Moses stood on the hilltop with his hands raised in prayer toward the Father. Even when Moses grew weary, others came and held up his arms, and so the Israelites attained victory. Moses' outstretched arms cannot help but remind us of the extended arms of the Crucified One by which He embraced all of humanity, with its sinfulness, and offered Himself to the Father for our salvation, even interceding for us with His words, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing."

Saint John Paul II too gave a powerful witness, especially at the end of his life, of praying even amid enormous suffering, refusing to come down from his cross. At his death, how many young people were gathered in St. Peter's Square assisting him on route to the Father's house?!!! How many conversions were brought about by the strength of God which shone through his human weakness?!!!

This reminds us of the power of intercessory prayer and the need for the whole Church to persevere in prayer in the spiritual battles of our day. We know how the Evil One attacks our bishops and priests. The scourge of the scandal of abuse, the priest shortage, the stressors of ministry, with priests serving three and four parishes, is beginning to take its toll. It is our collective task to support one another in prayer. When we are tempted to give up or when we sometimes feel ashamed of all that has happened, we need to reflect on this passage and be inspired by it.

I ask each of you here to pray for our bishops and priests that they may persevere in their vocations, especially their vocation to intercede for and offer sacrifice for the People of God. You, yourselves, as part of the priestly people of God have a certain power to intercede for the Church and our world. When you struggle to pray or struggle with distractions in prayer, take confidence because the whole Church, in her sacred liturgy, is praying with you and for you also!

It is true that many people experience desolation; they feel distant from God and want simply to give up. Mother Teresa of Calcutta experienced fifty years of spiritual darkness, but following the path laid out in the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, she remained faithful to her resolutions made during a period of consolation, when she felt close to the Lord. That is what I ask of you this evening – to be faithful to your baptismal promises and to your vocations; to persevere in your fidelity. In God's time, you will receive the reward of your faithfulness.

Finally, we also ought to remember that when we pray, it is not enough simply to persevere in maintaining the status quo; rather, we must advance the Kingdom of God. We have Good News to share with the people of the world – news that the Evil One wants to suppress – God saves. We have a mission to bring the joy of the Gospel to the world. As Pope Francis says:

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 1).