

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JULY 28, 2019
BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA NATIONAL JAMBOREE
THE SUMMIT: BETCHEL FAMILY NATIONAL SCOUT RESERVE
GLEN JEAN, WEST VIRGINIA

My Dear Friends,

As I begin, I wish to share the following message:

His Holiness Pope Francis sends warm greetings and the assurance of his prayers to all the members of the Scout associations gathered from various parts of the world for the celebration of the World Scout Jamboree. The Holy Father encourages all scouts and leaders to grow in their spiritual and religious commitment to God, respect for other persons and the bonds of friendship that they share. In this way, scouts will be able to offer a witness of faith and service to their local communities through the promotion of the ideals and activities of scouting. Pope Francis prays especially that scouts may continue to care for all of God's creation and help others appreciate the beauty of our common home. With these sentiments, the Holy Father gladly imparts to all who take part in this celebration of the Holy Mass his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and joy in the Lord.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State

I too come as Pope Francis' representative to the United States to assure you of his prayers and support. Two years ago, I was here for the Jamboree, and I am grateful to Archbishop Lori and to Bishop Conlon of Joliet, the Episcopal Liaison for the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, for their invitation. I also greet my brother bishops and the scout chaplains.

I was a scout for five years before I entered the seminary. Having traveled all over the world as a diplomat, I have seen its fruits in my life and in the lives of my nephews and nieces. By fostering the values of generosity, service, and fraternity, scouting helps create a better world. These values are the antidote to the selfishness that rules our society. Scouting encourages teamwork, a zeal for adventure and discovery, and gives us a new perspective on life and creation.

This vision is widened when we begin to see things as God sees them. This happens only through a life of prayer. Today's readings deal with the need for prayer and perseverance. As the Gospel begins, Jesus is alone at prayer. We know as scouts how busy we can get with activities, but Jesus takes time away to converse with His Heavenly Father. His disciples, attracted by His prayer, asked: *Teach us to pray as John taught his disciples to pray.*

Jesus then teaches them the *Lord's Prayer*. Today we have Saint Luke's version. Jesus begins by teaching them to call God *Father. Abba*, that is, Father suggests Divine Intimacy. God is not far away; he is close. He has a special bond with us, one first formed in baptism by which we become His children. As we grow in virtue and share in Jesus' life, we become ever-more "sons in the Son." Yes, God is our Father.

He never ceases to hear the prayers of His children. If we are God's children, then we should approach Him with childlike simplicity and trust.

But what type of Father is God? The First Reading provides some answers. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had sinned against God and had become corrupt. Abraham refused to just go along with them. He remained faithful to God; in that sense, he is a good model for us as Scouts. He resisted sin with courage and discipline. As for God, He is a just. He cannot let sin go unpunished.

Nevertheless, when God is going to destroy the city, Abraham intercedes before the face of God on behalf of the few innocent people there, whether are fifty, forty, twenty, or even ten. Abraham persists in pleading for the innocent. In this way, he reveals that God is merciful. God will spare the city for the sake of even a few innocent people. It is true that God is just, but He is also merciful. His mercy triumphs over raw justice. Abraham serves as a model for us to pray and to persevere in prayer; at the same time, he reveals to us that God is the Father of Mercy.

Jesus, in teaching His disciples how to pray, asks them to call God Father. He continues with *hallowed be your Name*. God is just. He is merciful. He is holy. Jesus teaches his disciples to honor God with their lips, to not take his name in vain. This simple petition is a reminder that we are called to be holy. Elsewhere, it is written: *Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.* (Lev 19:2)

Your kingdom come. We must pray fervently for the coming of the Kingdom. It is here but has not come in its fulness. Implicitly, this petition asks that the Kingdom of God, rooted in justice, truth, and love, would be planted in our hearts rather than the Kingdom of the Evil One. It also invites us to reflect on whether we are working to help advance God's Kingdom by working for justice, by witnessing to the truth, and by loving our neighbor. These are some of the timeless values of scouting – being faithful to our commitments and working hard to build something that helps others. Of course, *if God does not build the house, in vain do the builders labor*. Still, each of us must do our part in cooperating with God in advancing the Kingdom, by our deeds and by our prayers, mindful that it is *His* Kingdom. We want to create a better world, but it is only better if God is a part of it. It's *His* Kingdom.

The next three petitions focus on what we need: our daily bread, forgiveness, and protection from temptation. As scouts you know that for a long journey, you need to prepare properly and bring enough food (or be able to catch your food). To survive and have strength to journey on, we must eat. St. Luke's use of the term *daily* bread is unique; he uses a word *epiousios*, which means "special" or "super-substantial" bread. It is a clear allusion to the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, which we need for our spiritual journey. Elsewhere, the Scriptures tell us that *man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God*. The Scriptures and the Eucharist give us strength each day for our journey in this life, so that we may reach our goal, which is heaven. Ask for this Bread always.

Along the journey, we also need to ask God for pardon. *Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone in debt to us*. As scouts, you also know how heavy your backpack can feel on a long journey. Sometimes we carry extra weight which slows us down and gradually wears us down. In the spiritual life, that "burden" or "extra weight" is our sinfulness. Only God can forgive sin and lighten our load, but we must ask Him: *Forgive us*. He is the Father of Mercy. He is ready to forgive. When we receive His Mercy, he does ask something of us – to forgive others. Holding grudges can also paralyze us and keep us from moving forward on our journey together.

Finally, Jesus concludes with *Do not subject us to the final test*, namely temptation. Again, as scouts you are aware of the dangers of the wilderness, of bad weather, of certain types of plants, and even of dangerous paths and streams. You are trained to always be attentive and vigilant. Still, sometimes we aren't watchful. Injuries that could have been avoided aren't due to our own foolishness or carelessness. The same is true in the spiritual life. There are obvious sins that we should avoid, but sometimes we become spiritually inattentive. We want to do things our own or we think that something is not a big deal, and then we find ourselves in spiritual danger. The devil too lays hidden traps for us. This petition asks for God's help and protection – to not lead us into temptation but to guide us along the way.

The journey is never an easy one. In the face of setbacks, we need to persevere. Jesus teaches his disciples to persevere in prayer, just like Abraham did in our First Reading. Jesus gives the example of the friend who goes and asks for three loaves of bread at midnight. He persists in his request until it is granted. We need to be the same way with God in prayer. Once more, Jesus says, *Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*

We must have a confident trust and ask God for what we truly need. Sometimes it seems that our prayers are not heard. It is not that God doesn't hear us; rather, God knows what is best for us. Humbly, we ask God, and humbly we receive whatever comes from His hand, knowing that He loves us. We must also seek. As scouts, you are modern day explorers – seeking out new adventures, discovering new ways of doing things. In the spiritual life, we must also seek the face of God and search for the Truth. Eventually, we will find Him, and when we do, it will change our lives. When we meet God, He gives our life a decisive direction and helps us to know about our vocation and how we can best serve Him. Finally, we must also knock for the door to be opened. God already does this with us. He knocks at the doors of our hearts, waiting to enter. We must unlock our hearts and be open to Him. We also must knock at the door of the Heart of God to know His Mercy and Love.

Jesus uses the threefold progression - asking, seeking, and knocking – to teach his disciples of the need to not give up. We also need to help each other not to quit. Consider an example from scouting. When scouts are hiking or climbing a mountain, the most important thing is not who gets to the top of the mountain first or most quickly, rather it is that all arrive at the destination safely, all reach the goal, and all remain together as a troop. Sometimes, the slower members need encouragement to persevere and to arrive at the goal. Each person walks according to his abilities, but with encouragement of others. The journey allows each person to gain perspective, reach the goal with others, and to enjoy the view from the summit. The same is true in prayer; as scouts, you can encourage each other not only in life, but also in prayer, devotion and coming to Mass each Sunday.

Finally, today's Gospel concludes with Jesus promising that His *Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him*. Just as Jesus taught us to call God our Father and revealed Himself to be the Son, He reminds His disciples to pray for the Holy Spirit. Think about how the Holy Spirit transformed the Apostles at Pentecost! He gave them wisdom, courage, and understanding! You received that Spirit in baptism and were sealed with Him in confirmation. Do you ask the Father to continually give you that Spirit with his gifts? Do you let the Spirit guide you?

Blessed Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus writes that "The Holy Spirit is the life of the Church. He is the vital principle, not only in giving it life, but also as its vital principle of action." We must constantly ask the Father for an outpouring of the Spirit to be renewed, purified, strengthened, and guided as we

discern the path to go in life. It is the Spirit who helps us to be courageous and bold in our witness to Christ and in our service of our neighbor and our country. In the Spirit, we share our faith.

My friends, I have spoken long enough. In the end, I could sum it up with the words of Saint Paul: *Pray unceasingly*. But just as we each must pray to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – so too each of us – as men – need a woman in our lives: a Mother. At Calvary, Jesus gave each of us Mary as our Mother. She too hears our prayers and intercedes for us, watching over us with her maternal tenderness. Two years ago, I concluded my homily by singing the “Scout Prayer,” composed by the Venerable Father Jacques Sevin. Today, I wish to conclude by commending you to Our Lady with another hymn he wrote – Notre Dame des éclaireurs – Our Lady of the Scouts:

1. Le soir étend sur la terre
Son grand manteau de velours,
Et le camp, calme et solitaire,
Se recueille en ton amour.

Refrain :

**Ô Vierge de lumière,
Étoile de nos coeurs,
Entends notre prière,
Notre-Dame des éclaireurs**

2. Ô Douce Dame aux étoiles
Jette un regard sur ce camp
Où tes fils, sous leurs frêles toiles
Vont dormir en t'invoquant.

3. Ô Toi, plus blanche que neige,
Ravie au mont virginal,
Ta beauté, Vierge, nous protège
Contre la laideur du mal.

4. Que tes bontés maternelles
Veillent sur ceux qui sont tiens,
Place ici comme des sentinelles
Les bons anges nos gardiens.

5. Comme les tentes légères
Que l'on roule pour partir,
Garde-nous, âmes passagères
Toujours prêtes à mourir.

6. Fais-nous quitter l'existence
Joyeux et pleins d'abandon,

Comme un scout après les vacances,
S'en retourne à la maison.