

Homily 29th Sunday (Year C): “Pray always without becoming weary”

- In the Gospel today from St. Luke, Jesus tells His disciples a parable about the necessity to “*pray always - without becoming weary.*” This is only one of the many parables in which Our Lord instructs us about the value – and necessity – of prayer.

In our first reading we see Moses persevering in prayer, holding his arms up (in the shape of a cross, as saints tell us), to gain a victory for Israel.

- Some years back, Pope St. John Paul II (Gen. Aud. 12/1/94) addressed the topic of the need to take time out of our day to converse with God in prayer. He said:

“Doubtless, when work is performed according to God’s will, something pleasing to the Lord is being done, and this is a form of prayer.”

In other words, we can offer up to God the good works we perform, and in a general sense we can call this prayer, or, a sacrificial offering to God.

- Continuing, St. John Paul tells us: “But it is equally true that this is not enough: Specific moments must be expressly devoted to prayer, following the example of Jesus, who even in the midst of the most intense messianic activity withdrew to pray (Lk. 5:16).”

- St. John Paul goes on to say that in these daily “pauses” for prayer, we can find “inspiration, energy, the courage to face difficulties and obstacles, balance, and a capacity for initiation [for doing good].”

- Traditionally, these daily pauses include prayers in the morning, at meals, and prayers before retiring at night.

- “*Prayer is bread and life for the soul,*” says St. Padre Pio.

- We should, as we begin our day, turn to God and ask His assistance.

- The “Morning Offering” which the Apostleship of Prayer promotes, is an excellent means to start the day; for in this prayer, we offer to Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, all of our prayers, works, joys and sufferings of the day, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world –

even if we do not have the opportunity to attend Mass, we do so intentionally; and in this beautiful prayer we pray for the salvation of souls, we make reparation for sins, and we pray that all Christians may be brought back into union with Catholic Church.

- Another prayer we should always say in the morning is the prayer to our Guardian Angel, asking that he be our “light” and to “guard over us, and guide us” throughout the day.

- Praying before and, if we can, after meals is way of sanctifying our daily routine by giving thanks to God and acknowledging that even the food we eat is His gift.

It also helps to guide our conversation during meals.

If done in public, we can make a good impression on others by our brief pause for prayer, whether done in silence or in a soft voice, and by making a reverent (not rushed) Sign of the Cross. It’s a great way to evangelize.

I recall hearing of someone whose conversion to Catholicism began when he saw someone each day at lunch make the Sign of the Cross, slowly and deliberately, and was inspired.

As a priest, I always pray when at a restaurant, and often I hear conversations at surrounding tables turn to religious topics.

- In addition to praying at meals, we should make it a practice to pause briefly at different times throughout the day, in the midst of our duties and activities, to lift our minds and hearts to God in some manner.

Doing so sanctifies our work.

St. Josemaría Escrivá recommends that we keep a crucifix nearby our work station, in order to stop periodically and gaze at the Savior who performed the greatest work of all, our Redemption.

Another worthy practice is to stop every hour or so and make an act of Spiritual Communion, asking Our Lord that even though we cannot receive Him sacramentally, He come at least spiritually into our hearts. (See back inside cover – green missal/hymnals – 1st prayer)

- Each evening before we retire, we should undertake a short but thorough examination of conscience. Different ways: one can use Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, or some other means as a guide or checklist.
- One of my favorite means: use the Fruits of the Holy Spirit & ask:
 - Was I at peace today with all that happened?
 - Did I consciously try to exude joy, to being the joy of Christ to others?
 - Did I practice patience; in what way did I fail to take up my daily cross?
- In doing the Examination of Conscience, we should ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us as to how this day we have offended God, or failed to cooperate with His grace - in thought, word, act or omission, and then make a sincere act of contrition, and resolve to do better tomorrow.

This is an excellent way to develop sensitivity to our own habitual weaknesses and to grow in true self-knowledge – a prerequisite for becoming saints.

- In addition to the above practices, we should set out some block of time each day for meditative prayer. Jesus tells us: “Go to your room, shut your door, and pray to your Father in secret.”

I always think of my mother – every night, while all the guys were watching TV (my dad and I and my brothers), she would go to the bedroom, shut the door, and pray. It made an effect on the rest of us.

- For some, the morning is a good time for meditation; for others, the evening; still others may be able to devote some of the lunch break to meditative prayer.
- The important thing is to SET A TIME and try to be faithful to that time – and to realize that the Devil will throw up every obstacle to prevent us from praying. The evil one does not want us to pray, especially meditative prayer.

St. Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church who reformed the Carmelites, stresses this (her image is in our sanctuary, top right).

- The Most Holy Rosary an excellent method for meditation, with its four sets of twenty mysteries on the life of Our Lord and Our Lady: joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious.

- Popes call it a “compendium of the Gospel.”

- Pope John Paul II liked to say that with the Rosary, we meditate on the mysteries of Christ “through the eyes of the Heart of Mary.” How beautiful!

The Mother of God helps us, her spiritual children, to come to know her Son.

- Recall that Our Lady was sent by God to Fatima, Portugal to command us to pray the Rosary (5 decades) each day for the conversion of sinners, and to bring peace to the world. Both simple and profound, anyone can pray this prayer!

- Another excellent means to practice meditation in prayer is to read Sacred Scripture – the written word of God – which, as St. Paul tells us in our 2nd reading today (2nd Tim.), is “useful for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness.”

When reading Scripture, pause when a verse strikes you, and ponder it. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you as to its deeper meaning, and how to apply to your life.

- Once again, the important thing about meditation is to be committed to a daily routine, and this is not easy; it takes discipline. It may require turning off the television or computer, or cutting short our socializing with friends and neighbors to get in our prayer time.

- St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, the great convert from Anglicanism, says: “Nothing is more difficult than to be disciplined and regular” in our prayer life. “It is easy to be religious in fits and starts” – at times when we “feel” spiritual, but to be consistent at prayer is a trial, he says, because by nature we are so weak and inconstant.

Newman stresses that Satan “perceives well that daily private prayer is the very emblem and safeguard of true devotion to God,” and of maintaining us in a course of good conduct, of holiness of life.

- This is precisely why the Devil will use any and every means to prevent us from praying regularly. He will whisper, “Oh, put off prayer, this or that thing is more important, more necessary now.”

- To guard ourselves against his wiles, we should turn to the “Woman” who crushes his proud head: the Blessed Virgin. She is, after Jesus Himself, our model in prayer.

- Let us call upon our Mother, Mary, each day, and beseech her to help us in order that we may “*pray always, without becoming weary.*”