

Homily for the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle C

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Young children love a bedtime story. The adventure of reading and listening to stories begins with pictures; then words, which they hear and try to say; new words which they learn and later, letter by letter, begin to read. Travels to far distant lands, tales of princes and princesses, battles between good and evil; stories are the starting point for learning and enjoying books. They open the child up to the world. The reading of a bedtime story is also a time of safety for children when they are close to a loving parent. Snuggling up to listen to a story is a wonderful part of childhood.

The great Bible stories also inspire children: for example, David and Goliath, the cutting of Samson's hair, the discovery of the basket with baby Moses by Pharaoh's daughter, the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, Jesus' miracles, the Sermon on the Mount. These stories begin to shape a child's

imagination. Later stories of martyrs and saints can further tell the Christian story.

When Saint Paul writes to Timothy, the Bishop of Ephesus, as we heard in today's second reading, he asks him to remember his teachers and all that he has learned from childhood from the holy scriptures. Timothy would have grown up hearing stories from the Jewish scriptures, learned the psalms in Hebrew and prayed them, and later, from his Christian mother, heard stories about Jesus. As a man dedicated to God, Timothy learned about the power and necessity of prayer. Prayer was part of life: in the morning, in the evening, on the sabbath, on Sundays and on feast days. The words of today's psalm response would have echoed in his heart, "Our help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth." He could trust that help would come from God and that he would be protected and guarded from evil or going astray.

The story of Moses in the first reading reminds us of the need to be faithful and persistent in prayer, even when we grow tired. The context for this story is when a king named Amalek launches a war against the Israelites. Like the king of Egypt, this king attempts to halt the progress of God's chosen people. But as long as the people of Israel stay focused on God,

nothing can stand in their way. In these early stages of their journey, however, Moses and people still need assurances to give them courage. Moses used the staff to work earlier miracles. Now he employs it again. This time he holds it high so the Israelites can clearly see it while on the field of battle. As long as they can see the staff, the people prevail on the battlefield. But their reliance on the staff begins to take its toll. Moses grows tired; Aaron and Hur must come to his aid. With the staff thus elevated, the people under Joshua's leadership are completely victorious.

One of the lessons we learn from this story is the importance of supporting each other in prayer. If we pray only when we are alone, we risk growing tired and giving up. That is one of the reasons why we need to come to church and pray with each other. When we gather together to pray as a community, we help support each other to persevere in our prayer.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the story of a widow who constantly comes to visit a judge to demand justice. You can imagine the tenacity of this woman. She kept knocking at his door for justice. The corrupt judge has lost interest in his work and really does not care for those who seek justice. He is comfortable, negligent and avoids his responsibilities to those in need. He simply sorts out the case to get some peace. In contrast, God will see justice

done, although, in human eyes, it may seem to take a long time. Presumably some of Jesus' followers were questioning whether it was worth praying because they did not get the results they wanted or when they wanted. Jesus teaches that for our prayers to be effective, we must have faith that God will hear and answer our prayers.

The key is to continue prayerful perseverance. If an unjust judge will grant a poor widow justice because of her perseverance, then certainly an all-just and faithful God will not abandon God's people in time of trial and discouragement. God does not calculate time as humans do. What appears to be a slow response from a human perspective might be quick in God's eyes. We must remain steadfast in faith and persevering in prayer.

We are invited to be faithful in prayer and to know the scriptures. Saint Jerome said, "Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ." The scriptures are the way by which we begin to understand God's mercy and the person of Jesus Christ. By seeing Him in the Bible stories, listening to His words, we begin to taste and see, sense and feel, with the mind of Christ. We begin to see with different eyes and have different attitudes.

The Bible stories and the stories of the saints open up the children's minds to the person of Jesus. As they hear the words of Jesus, they begin to

know His love for them. As they hear of God working in the saints, they begin to learn about the ways to be a Christian in the world. As they learn their prayers and say the Our Father, they begin to speak with words taught by Jesus.

Could any other stories be more important? The scriptures are a treasure to be ever more deeply explored so that we might know the love and mercy of Jesus Christ and become women and men dedicated to God, and nourished with Our Lord's Real Presence in the Eucharist, we become fully equipped with God's grace to be cooperators in doing His good work.

May God give us this grace. Amen.