

## **October 20, 2013 Pray and Never Loose Heart Homily:**

Dear brothers and sisters, Let me share with you a memory from my childhood. In 1962, I was in my first year serving at the altar of St. Teresa of Avila Church in Albany. At the time, I was eight years old. Immediately following each Mass, the priest offered prayers for "the conversion of Russia". The country's state sponsored atheism deprived many faith communities of their religious liberties. Christians, in particular, were harassed by the secret police and many were martyred for their faith. From 1929 until 1965 prayers were said for Russia. The persecutions continued; nothing changed. The cynics and skeptics taunted the church. They cried, "Is your God sleeping? Is He hard of hearing? Perhaps you must speak louder! Does your God understand Latin? Then, the communist government expectantly collapsed in 1989.

One recalls the indignities suffered by the African-American community since the time of slavery. It was not until over one hundred years had passed that a civil rights bill was enacted. How many prayers were offered by the Christian faithful? They persevered and never lost heart. Since the legalization of abortion on demand, Christians continue to pray for the legal protection of pre-born human life. They have not lost heart. Nor have they been overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness. They remain patient and never cease to pray that an unjust law may one day be overturned.

The evangelist, St. Luke's interest in prayer is known by those who are familiar with his gospel. No less than nine times do we read of Jesus at prayer. In the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Lk. 18:1-6) the key figure in the story is a widow, a symbol of a lowly and defenseless person. She has only one weapon at her disposal: her persistence. The whole point of the parable is simply that it is necessary to pray unceasingly and never give up.

What other lessons can we derive from today's reading?

1.) Our innate capacity for prayer is one of God's great gifts. In an unforgettable Hasidic Jewish tale, a rabbi of a small farming village speaks of the people who come to him on the days they ride to the market. Once a man approached him and cried-- "Rabbi, I haven't gotten anything out of life! All week I get out of one wagon and into another. But when a man stops to think that he is permitted to pray to God Himself, he lacks nothing at all in the world"

2.) Prayer is "the greatest transforming power in the world." (Pope Benedict)  
Prayer changes us. There is a story told of two Catholic figures of the last century-- Jacques and Raissa Maritiain. As students at the University of Paris, the two of them came under the baleful influence of atheistic philosophies. A sense of hopelessness and despair loomed over them and they were tempted to each commit suicide. They entered into a mutual pact that, if within a short time frame, they failed to find meaning in their life, and then they would, without hesitation, take the final tragic step. A personal friend then intervened who was a devout Catholic and recognized author, Leon Bloy. Their friend insisted that they pray. "But why? they protested. "We are atheists. What you request of us is absurd,

ridiculous". "Pray", Bloy demanded. They finally relented and began to pray. Prayer transformed them. Today, Jacques and his wife, Raissa, have been declared candidates for canonization.

3.) Patience is a necessary virtue- God hears and answers our prayers at the appropriate moment. Losing heart is not an option for the one who believes in the power of prayer and God's providence.

4.) Prayer is intensely personal and oftentimes requires our rapt attention and privacy.

In the popular "Peanuts" comic strip, the ever-curious Linus asks Lucy, his older sister a question. "Do you ever pray?" An irritated Lucy replies: "That's a very personal question. I suppose you think you're somebody very smart, don't you? I suppose you think .....". In the last frame, an exasperated Linus says to his friend Charlie Brown "You're right. Charlie Brown, religion is a very tough subject!"

Brothers and sisters, if we neglect prayer we suffer and the Church suffers. Let us recall the parable about the necessity for us to pray always without becoming weary. And with gratitude we recall the closing words of the gospel spoken by Our Divine Lord: "Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily?"( Lk:18:6-7).

Amen