

Last Sunday we listened to a beautiful passage from the Gospel, where we were taught that true faith implies praise, gratitude: do you remember the ten lepers who were healed, but just one went back to praise God?

The other nine got back into the flow of their life, of their worldly concerns; it was as if they had just won the lottery. Then they lived – we can gather – without the faith that, instead, the tenth leper had gained.

The parable we have listened to tonight closes on a **question about faith, in a passage that wants to help us to purify it and to understand the quality of our faith: it is closely related to prayer.**

Actually the teaching seems to be self-evident: *Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

Hence, dearest, we can say: we must never get tired of praying.

However, our Lord provides an example.

The parable is a way to teach us something, through a story which is not meant to be taken literally: **what's the meaning of "always pray without ever giving up"?**

And how shall we pray, without ever getting tired?

The first reading helps us better understand the meaning of this type of prayer: the tale of the people of Israel in the desert; a battle that was won through prayer – in particular the prayers of Moses, who kept his arms raised from dawn till dusk! And whenever he was tired, his friends themselves helped him to hold them up.

But it was not just Moses' prayer, because that prayer was said holding **God's staff**. This is what we are told in the book of Exodus: *Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.*

What is this staff?

We know; do you remember the staff that turns into a snake and eats the other snakes?
The staff that hits the rock from which water springs, when the people of Israel were thirsty?
(see Ex 7,8-12 and Ex 17,1-7)

In short, **this staff is the symbol, the mark, the means of God's factual, historical presence which operates among men.**

This prayer of Moses is, as a consequence, supported and lived in full and close communion with God.

So it is constant, but in communion with God.

A prayer that has to be said and addressed to God all the time, as the Gospel says tonight, while waiting for God to do justice.

This could be the beginning of a major speech that we cannot deal with in a homily, because the verse – *And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?* – is very difficult to interpret, as the exegetes say.

One of the possible interpretations is: “will He keep them waiting for a long time?”

A translation that puzzles us, though, because all of us know through experience that we pray, we pray and almost always nothing we expect comes true.

Perhaps, as the Scriptures say, this happens because we do not ask the right things, or because we do not pray in the right way...

However, since the parable closes with: *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*, it **invites us to give our life a broader prospective than the simple and limited horizon of our daily routine.**

Actually, between the miracle we listened to last week and this one, there is that famous passage where somebody asked Jesus: *When will the Kingdom of God come? How shall we recognize it?*

And the Lord answered: *The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed*; it will come unexpectedly, just as it was in the days of Noah: *People were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage...*

Just as it was in the days of Sodom: *People were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage...* And then it came... (see Luke 17,20-37).

So the Lord states that we must put an existential perspective on our daily life, aimed at the kingdom of God through prayer, and that we must patiently wait for enemies to be defeated: the enemies of man, the enemies of faith – we can think that also at the time of persecutions, when Saint Luke wrote this passage, the believers were wondering why the kingdom of God was not coming with the release from the Roman persecutor...

Tonight, however, **I would like to suggest one more interpretation:**

who are *our* real enemies, whom God must give justice to?

Who are the enemies that must be defeated, to let us live a veritable experience with God?

They are *our inner* enemies.

Those that make us live in a condition of inadequacy, or even in sin.

Or, it is simply the history of man who struggles on, because also we Christians are not thoroughly honest, saints who are able to change this world...

So, the enemies that fight and prevent the world, the Church and us to develop, are the enemies that God undoubtedly wants to destroy and eliminate, but he cannot do that if we do not pray all the time, night and day...

And we must do it in communion with God, like Moses, holding a staff, which is our faith in God.

To sum up, today the *Liturgy of the Word* tells us that **we must set prayer above everything**: this passage is definitely not addressed to clergymen or priests; Jesus was speaking to people: *always pray, and never lose heart...*

We priests know, through the dialogue of the confessional, that for most believers, prayer is one of the last things they do at the end of their day.

When I ask the fateful question – and I ask everybody – **How do you pray?** Normally, they answer: yes, I do , a thought... at night...

And I reply: but when night comes, the day is already over! It's time to thank ...

And they say: well, I have got so many things to do...

We have got many things to do and the only one that we neglect is the most important in our life!

If we are concerned with nourishing our body adequately in order to be able to physically cope with daily work, if we nourish our intelligence and culture to face up with the difficulties of political commitment, of social relationships, of cultural problems, **how can we forget to pray and ask God for help to deal with the problems of our true relationship with him?**

All of us are called to be one with God!

When Jesus was asked: what is the most important thing in the Scriptures, he answered: *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*

How can we achieve such a goal if we pray little, improperly and absent-mindedly?

Jesus told his disciples a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

We should, then, ask God in this Eucharist to help us to **consider prayer as a priority, or rather the very first of our daily life**, If we really want to be Jesus' disciples, if we want Him to find us in our faith, when he comes and visit us at the end of our life or at the end of time.