

My Brothers and Sisters,

It is often said that what distinguishes the Catholic Church is that we are a sacramental church. Sacraments are at the heart of our relationship with God. Today's readings focus on two other major components of our relationship with God: prayer and Scripture.

The message of today's Gospel could not be more clear: *"Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary."* The parable contrasts the behavior of the unjust judge with the behavior of God. The unjust judge finally does the right thing out of fear. In contrast, Jesus says that God will act speedily to provide justice to his chosen people who call out to him day and night.

Jesus' teaching was foreshadowed in the story of Moses in today's reading from Exodus. Moses told Joshua to engage Amalek in battle. Moses said that he would stand on top of the hill with staff in hand and his hands raised to God. According to the story, as long as Moses kept his hands raised, Joshua did well in battle. When he became weary and lowered his arms, the battle went against them. Therefore, Aaron and Hur supported his hands, and the Israelites won the battle.

In his Second Letter to Timothy, St. Paul proclaims the importance of Scripture in our relationship with God. This is because *"all Scripture is inspired by God."* We believe that the Bible is the living Word of God, that God speaks to us through Scripture. Our last three Popes have all emphasized the importance of developing a personal relationship with God, a personal relationship with Jesus, the Son of God. We cannot do this if we do not know him. One of the best ways to know him is to listen to him speaking to us through the words of Scripture. This passage suggests that it is important to start knowing the Scriptures as children. Knowing the Scriptures makes us competent Christians equipped for every good work, including proclaiming the God's Word to others.

Prayer and Scripture really go together. Relationships are built on communication, both speaking and listening. When we read the Scriptures or when the Scriptures are proclaimed to us, we listen to God speaking to us. When we pray, we speak to God. Although both the first reading and the Gospel focus on prayers of petition, we know that asking for what we need in relationships is only one part of our communication. Most important is thanksgiving. The Eucharist is primarily a prayer of thanksgiving. In the best relationships, there is affirmation. In prayer, we praise and adore God. Finally, there is contrition, asking for forgiveness. All of these forms of prayer should be part of our personal prayer. All of them are incorporated into the Eucharist.

My brothers and sisters, there are three verses in the Bible that I think about quite often. Although we know that God is merciful, Scripture also teaches that we are accountable to God for our lives. The first of these three verses is the final verse of today's Gospel. Jesus ended the parable with a question, *"But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"* We would be missing the point if we start questioning the faith of others or even the faith of the Church or the faith of our society. We each need to question our own faith. Do I really put God first in my life? Where does God fit into my priorities? Am I willing to entrust my life and my future to God and Jesus? Does what I say I believe impact my life? Do I have a personal relationship with God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? Do I practice and live my faith? These are the questions we should all be asking ourselves.