

Fifth Sunday After Easter – Extraordinary Form
Ave Maria Catholic Church, Sunday, May 22, 2022

James 1: 22-27

Dearly beloved: be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

John 16: 23-30

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: “On that day, you will not question me about anything. Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now, you have not asked anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete. I have told you this in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but I will tell you clearly about the Father. On that day, you will ask in my name, and I do not tell you that I will ask the Father for you. For the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.” His disciples said, “Now you are talking plainly, and not in any figure of speech. Now we realize that you know everything and that you do not need to have anyone question you. Because of this, we believe that you came from God.”

The Battle of Prayer

Fifth Sunday after Easter - John 16: 23-30

Ave Maria Catholic Church, May 22, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

“Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you,” (John 16: 24). These words of Jesus are consoling, are they not? Jesus comes to us to teach us. He teaches us that we have a good Father in heaven ready to assist us.

Our Father in heaven is not indifferent to our needs. On the contrary, to show his love and care, He sent Jesus to us to be our mediator, the one who reconciles us with the Father. And now Jesus says: *“Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.”*

We know, however, that our asking or our prayer is a constant battle. There is an image in the book of Exodus that illustrates this battle, (Ex 17:8-13).

Moses told Joshua: *“Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”*

So, Joshua did as Moses instructed. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the battle.

But Moses’ hands grew tired, so he sat down on a rock. Meanwhile, Aaron and Hur supported his hands. In this way, Moses’ hands remained steady till sunset. Then, Israel’s victory was complete.

Prayer is a battle. Prayer requires time, attention, and effort. We must discipline ourselves for what spiritual writers call “spiritual combat.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church dedicates a whole section to this topic. It is called *“The Battle of Prayer”* (CCC, 2725-2745)

This is a battle against the devil. Prayer is an intimate sharing between friends; as Saint Teresa says: *“Prayer means taking time frequently to be alone with God who we know loves us.”* The devil does not like this union with God in prayer; on the contrary, he seeks our disillusion, our disappointment. The devil does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God.

Saint Teresa indicates that this was the worst temptation of her life: the temptation of abandoning prayer. Why? The answer is clear: We pray as we live, and we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name.

This is also a battle against our “old self.” Jesus brings to us the newness of life, the newness of grace and virtue. However, our fallen nature wants to drag us to the former ways of life, to the “old self.” And there is the battle!

Prayer is a battle in which we must fight our misconceptions. Prayer must not be reduced to a simple psychological activity, or what is even worse, to an effort of concentration to reach a mental void. Prayer must not be reduced to ritual words and postures. We must never forget that prayer comes from the Holy Spirit and not from ourselves alone.

Saint Paul says, “*No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit,*” (1 Cor 12: 3). The Holy Spirit teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said. The Holy Spirit instructs the Church in the life of prayer. Then, we understand that prayer is, above all, a supernatural gift that comes from God. Therefore, the first condition to receive this gift is a humble heart.

Prayer is a battle in which we must fight our lack of faith. Do we truly believe that we have a Father in heaven? Then, why not devote time in conversation with Him instead of placing a thousand other works and cares as our priorities? Sometimes, we turn to God as our last resort, but is God just that? Is God our insurance policy? God is greater than that!

God is our good Father in heaven, who knows better than us what is good for us and who is ready to give us what is best for us. Again, we need a humble heart to recognize God’s greatness and love and accept that “*Apart from Him, we can do nothing,*” (see John 15:5).

Prayer is a battle in which we fight our lack of love. The spiritual authors call this fight with the name of *acedia*. It is a form of depression, decreasing vigilance, and of a carelessness heart. These words describe well the battle: “*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,*” (Matthew 26:41).

Part of the problem is our love of easy money. We overly prize production and profit, and as a result, we consider prayer unproductive and useless. We exalt sensuality and comfort as the criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and we forget that the true, the good, and the beautiful have one source: God himself.

Only the humble heart will be able to say: “*Lord, help me!*” “*Lord, strengthen me!*” “*A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit. Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me your holy spirit. Restore to me the gladness of your salvation; uphold me with a willing spirit,*” (Psalm 51: 12-14).

Prayer is a battle, but it is a battle that transforms our lives and makes them more like the life of Jesus with the same mind and heart.

Jesus is the model; he prays in us and with us. Now the heart of Jesus seeks only what pleases the Father; how could our prayer be centered on the gifts rather than the Giver?

Jesus also prays for us - in our place and on our behalf. All our petitions were gathered up, once for all, in his cry on the Cross and, in his Resurrection, and the Father heard them.

Even more, He never ceases to intercede for us with the Father. If our prayer is resolutely united with that of Jesus, in trust and boldness as children, we obtain all that we ask in his name and it is good for our eternal salvation.

Like Moses, let us face this battle with confidence. Let us lift our hearts to God in prayer, and our Father in heaven will bless us with His gifts. Amen