

30th Sunday Ordinary Time “C”

October 22-23, 2022

Readings: Sirach 35:12-18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Luke 18:9-14

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Perhaps no other words of Saint Paul have such a courageous and dare I say, patriotic ring to them as do these. Often quoted, we may have even forgotten from where they came—that these are the inspired word of God. They speak to us of the importance of perseverance, a virtue for which we must all pray, now and at the hour of our death.

It is also a virtue often exhibited by missionaries across the globe. This weekend we celebrate World Mission Sunday. It was established by Pope Pius XI in 1926. It is also the second centenary of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, founded in 1822 by the recently beatified French laywoman Pauline Jaricot. It is an outstanding organization.

Missionaries across the globe persevere, face the reality of discouragement when their message is not well received, and suffer loneliness from being away from family and all that is familiar to them. They minister in the most difficult of circumstances. We offer our prayerful support today.

Once while I was attending a conference for priests at a beautiful retreat house on the New Jersey shore, the director related a story of how some priests had complained that the water in the shower was quite tepid. Funny, he thought—for the Maryknoll missionary priests who were attending the very same conference had gone out of their way to thank him for his hospitality. They especially noted how thrilled they were to have running water for the week! Any questions about the tepid water?

Perseverance is needed in every stage of our lives, that by the time we are adults, we have had ample opportunities to exercise this virtue, even though we rarely appreciate its value. That may be because perseverance is so often associated with holding on until the end in some especially difficult task or trial. But it also applies to the challenges of daily life. Persevere in your math class—soon enough you’ll understand the proofs of geometry. Persevere with your newborn baby, the young mother is

told. She will eventually sleep through the night. Just hang on. A few short years from now and the kids will all be off to college or have moved into their own places. You will no longer have to wait up on a Saturday evening for your teenager to come home safely.

Saint Paul is writing of the perseverance and faith. And yes, he knew firsthand, that it was a perseverance born out of much hardship and suffering. By this point in his life, he likely suspected that he would die for his faith. He also knew the dignity of the human person, and what would be ahead for those who fought the good fight.

On the occasion of his reception of the 1950 Nobel Prize for literature, author William Faulkner spoke about the human capacity to endure. This was post World-War II, a time when many had serious questions about humanity's survival amid prolonged and continual conflict:

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's duty is to write about these things.¹

Recall the promise recorded by Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."² It takes a tremendous faith to believe this promise, especially when our own human experience would appear to contradict it.

Then again, who are we to question God's promises? Like Saint Paul, we may feel as though everyone has abandoned us, but God is calling us to patient trust in him regardless of the circumstances. While we may struggle with accepting his will in our life, God knows what he is doing.

¹ William Faulkner's speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1950. Faulkner knew rejection many times over. He made 94 submissions of short stories to seven magazines from 1930 to 1931. Of those, he placed a total of 12 stories.

² Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Take the lesson of today's Gospel. Two men- one a Pharisee, the other tax collector. Clearly, taxes have never been popular, not just today. Yet, the difference between the two men is tangible. Man judges by appearances, but God judges the heart. He knows our struggles; he knows our heart. Share your heart with him; do not fear. God will give us the grace of perseverance in the moment of our greatest need.