

Homily for the Diocesan White Mass
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
October 15, 2016

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it good that we are here to celebrate the annual White Mass on behalf of those who work in healthcare.

Christ in the Gospel of Luke admonishes his disciples to pray without ceasing and without becoming weary. How do we accomplish these two things in the midst of everything else in our lives?

We have plenty of things that compete for our time and attention. For many of us, the demands of our families, our work, and other responsibilities can be all-consuming!

How then can we manage to devote the time and effort to praying unceasingly, as well as without becoming weary? It seems like a rather tall order. But prayer is not intended to be just one more thing on our lists of things to do. Rather than adding it on top of everything else, prayer must be **in the midst** of everything else.

We might think that prayer is a matter of being still and doing nothing else, but prayer takes many forms. To pray is to be intentional about how we pray and that can mean being intentional about being active in a spirit of prayer.

St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians: “Whatever you do in speech or action, do it in the name of the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being.” (Colossians 3:17-24)

From the Book of Deuteronomy we hear this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (Deut. 6:5)

The Lord desires that we commit our entire self to Him in all that we do. When we do our work in the name of Christ and for Him, all that we do becomes a form of prayer. This means that whoever we are and whatever our work in life, we can bring prayer into all that we do.

In our first reading from the Book of Exodus, the army of Amalek poses a serious threat for the tribes of Israel. But Moses, at least, seems confident that the Jewish people can stand up to them. He directs Joshua to engage the enemy, not with all able soldiers, but only with certain chosen men. As long as these selected fighters can see the staff of God held high by

Moses, they prevail against the enemy. When Moses grows tired and lowers the staff, the Israelites lose the advantage on the field. As a result, Aaron and Hur must stand on either side of Moses all day long to ensure that the staff of God is held aloft and visible for the Israelites fighting below.

What we learn from this story is how Moses was the very symbol of prayer for the Jewish people in their struggles with a great enemy. We learn from the example of Moses the importance of perseverance in prayer, but we also learn that we do not pray in isolation. Moses was able to persevere in prayer, not only because he was a man of prayer, but also because he had help from others who helped him with his prayer, and together they were able to help the whole community.

Following along this line, Saint Paul in his second Letter of to Timothy urged the beloved, "Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed" and he encouraged them to "be persistent" in proclaiming the Word of God "whether it is convenient or inconvenient." This message is further reinforced in today's Gospel passage, where Saint Luke relates that "Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary."

In the nearly two-thousand year history of the Church, we have seen perseverance in prayer practiced in countless situations, from the situations involving the Universal Church to those involving individual parishes and other Catholic institutions.

For those who work in healthcare, this is especially true. For you who work in hospitals and are confronted with illness, suffering, and even death on a daily basis, you know better than most the need for prayer in the midst of your essential work.

Just as Moses extended his hands in supplication to God from our first reading, so too do you extend your hands to care for those in need of healing. Being on the front lines for those in need, it is your hands that bring not only healing, but also the presence of Christ to those who seek Him.

Christ speaks of persistence in prayer from the parable in Luke's Gospel. He tells us we are to avoid becoming weary in our prayer. The persistence of prayer for which the Lord calls is something that happens when we are aided by the support of others.

We rely on the help of others in our common work, so too can we look to our fellow care-givers to pray for us, to strengthen and admonish

us. If we rely on our co-worker to accomplish our daily task, so too do rely upon the help that only comes from the Lord in prayer.

Encouraged by the Lord, we are able to incorporate into our daily work the indispensable virtue of charity. The grace that the Lord extends to us through the sacraments is a powerful way that we grow in the virtue of charity and so imitate Christ himself to those meet.

You who care for the sick are capable of being the healing, comforting presence of Christ to those who need it in their time illness.

The Lord always seeks to equip us with the strength to care for others. By committing our entire selves to the Lord in a spirit of prayer, we bring our prayer into all that we do. Thus, the charity that we foster within ourselves enables us to be Christ for others, carrying out the aim of my episcopal motte, *Lex Cordis Caritas*, the Law of the Heart is Love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.