

- Our first reading from the Book of Exodus presents us with an interesting story about the Israelites shortly after the miraculous parting of the Red Sea.
- After enduring years of slavery in Egypt, culminating in the showdown between Moses and Pharaoh with the 10 plagues and the institution of the Passover, the Israelites are now traveling toward Mt. Sinai, where they encounter the Amalekites.
- The Amalekites were not good people. Amalek was the grandson of Esau, and he and his descendants despised the progeny of Jacob, Esau's twin to whom he gave up his birthright. So, there was a natural animosity between the Israelites and the Amalekites.
- In their malice Amalekite scouts would prey upon and kill the weakest and most vulnerable Israelites who lagged behind the rest of the group – such as the elderly, the sick, or the poor with many children. They were pagans whose culture was a culture of death.
- In today's reading we see the first major confrontation for Israel after leaving Egypt in this battle with Amalek. It's not just the vulnerable Israelites being attacked. It's the whole nation being confronted by Amalek's primary forces. The survival of all of Israel is at stake.
- And just as He did in Egypt, and just as He did at the Red Sea, God intervenes in a powerful way, so that Israel is saved and the Amalekites are defeated.
- Yet, unlike the scene at the Red Sea where our Lord tells Moses that he and the Israelites need not do anything but stand their ground and watch the Lord win their victory, here two things happen: the Israelites must fight, and Moses must pray for them.
- And generally, this is how God intercedes in our lives – especially when we come face to face with a difficult circumstance or cross.
- Rather than performing grand miracles, God usually imbues us with His grace so that we may accomplish His will, just as He gave Joshua and the Israelites power to mow down the Amalekites.
- In general, our Lord works through the natural order to bring about His will. But God also requires prayer to bring about His will. He wants us to cooperate with Him, and this we do through prayer.
- You see, we tap into God's divine power through our prayer, as well as through fasting and penance. Our Lord uses our prayer, fasting, and penance as the mechanism by which He enacts His will.
- It's not that our prayers, fasting, and penances change God, but they do act as a spiritual lever to bring about His will. As a loving Father, He listens to our prayers intently, and He answers them according to His will.
- Our fasting and penance puts muscles on the bone of our prayer, strengthening its efficacy.
- So, God wants us to pray, fast, and do penance as a means of moving His Heart to exercise His power on our behalf. Thus, we must be men and women of faith. We must persevere in our prayer, trusting in God's providence, no matter how difficult it might be at times.
- Perseverance is one of the primary themes of our readings today. In our first reading, Moses must persevere in his prayers, with hands held aloft in order for the Israelites to gain their victory over Amalek.
- In our second reading, St. Paul commands St. Timothy to: "Proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching."

- And in our Gospel we have the story of the persistent widow, who perseveres in petitioning the dishonest judge until he renders her the decision she wants.
- In this Gospel story, the Lord says: "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"
- The point here is that our Lord wants us to continue reaching out to Him in prayer, even when we cannot see the fruits of our prayer. He wants us to remain faithful to Him.
- For God hears everything we say to Him, and we must trust that He answers our prayers in the manner that is most conducive to our salvation.
- Now all of us have certain needs or desires that we hope that God will grant, and so many of us go to God in prayer every day asking Him to give us what we want.
- Yet our prayer should not be primarily about our wants and needs. Our Father in Heaven is not Santa Claus! He is our loving Father Who knows what's best for us in every situation.
- Our Lord has a divine plan, a divine will for each of us and for all of creation, and in His humility, He allows our prayer to be the mechanism by which He enacts His will.
- Ultimately our prayer should be about getting to know God and discerning His will, and it's for this reason that we must persevere in our prayer.
- While the persistent widow got what she wanted because she persevered, our goal should in prayer should be to get to know what God desires for us – while trusting that He will give us exactly what we need.
- Sometimes the answer to our prayers will be "No." When our Lord says no to us, we must have faith enough to believe that it is always because He wants to grant us a greater Yes!
- Sometimes our Lord allows us to suffer, even when we beg Him to take it away. And as I've mentioned several times recently, when He does this, it's always because He desires to draw a greater good from our suffering.
- So often He wants us to grow in virtue or to make reparation for sin through our crosses.
- While we may be tempted to question His love for us when He doesn't ease our sufferings, persevering in prayer means that we persevere in trusting God.
- When we learn to persevere in our prayer, despite our sufferings, God gives us the grace to accept whatever answer He grants to our prayers, and in this humble acceptance of His will we are given the grace to grow in virtue.
- If we persevere in our prayer, while also trying to cultivate virtue, eventually our prayer changes so that eventually it becomes less and less something we do, and more and more something that God does within us. This is when we really make great strides in holiness.
- My brothers and sisters, in what ways are you tempted to doubt God? Is there a situation in your life that seems hopeless?
- Like Moses, keep your arms raised in prayerful supplication; fast and do penance as to strengthen your prayer. And then have faith that God hears your prayer and will answer it in the way most conducive to your salvation.
- Indeed, let us persevere not only in our prayer, but in our willingness to trust God, so that when the Son of Man returns, He will find faith on the earth.