

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, C – October 19, 2025 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 7:15 & 11am Sunday Masses – 800 words

Our first reading this Sunday puts us with the Israelites just a short time after they had left Egypt. We recall that they had been slaves in Egypt, and that after a series of marvels that defeated the Egyptian gods, including ten rather extraordinary plagues, they are then allowed to leave. As they began their Exodus, Pharaoh changed his mind and started pursuing them. But the Lord, the true God, had the final say and dealt the final blow against the Egyptians at the Red Sea, as the children of Israel passed through dry-shod, and as Pharaoh and also his chariots and charioteers drowned.

Now we find the Israelites still in Egypt, traveling across a land area known as the Sinai peninsula – a rocky and arid region with a nomadic tribe known as the Amalekites that inhabited it. They were a people who did not exactly embrace a culture of life or of hospitality, and so they began attacking the Israelites. As former slaves, they had very few weapons to defend themselves with, besides having been worn out by the journey. It seemed like certain defeat; it seemed like the god of Amalek would prevail against the God of Israel – for in that time, the armies invoked the help of their deity.

But as was often the case in the history of Israel, there was a surprising twist. In this case, Moses was inspired to send Joshua into battle while he stood on a hill overlooking it and held up his arms in intercession to the true God for his people. In stretching out his arms, Moses became what we call a “type” or foreshadowing of Christ on the cross. And Aaron and Hur became, as it were, a “type” of Simon of Cyrene helping him to carry the cross, or perhaps of the Blessed Mother and St. John faithfully standing beneath the cross as Christ offered his life in waging the definitive battle with evil.

If Israel had not been victorious in that battle, those that survived would have been enslaved by the Amalekites. Instead, they won, and eventually, after this and many more struggles and ultimately after the death of Moses, entered into the Promised Land. So it is with us. Looking toward the fulfillment in Christ of these Old Testament figures, we reflect upon how, born in Original Sin, we were slaves of the devil until we crossed our own Red Sea – until we received baptism. But Jesus has stretched out his arms for us, too, and interceded for us. And so we have the hope of heaven.

But like the Israelites in that battle with Amalek, we have different supporting roles. We do not merely put our feet up and sit back; no, some of us have the role of helping the Lord to carry his cross or supporting him by standing beneath the cross – I think especially of those who have been consecrated to God in Holy Orders or in religious life, but not only: many people share in this important ministry at the cross. In any case, we are all soldiers in the battle: each of us has to fight, to resist evil – and to depend upon God for the victory. Otherwise, we who once were set free become slaves again.

This is why the Church gives us this Gospel parable, one of many in which Jesus taught the lesson of perseverance in prayer. In fact, as we grow in spiritual maturity, we come to see more fully just how much prayer is the key to any victory over vice and evil that we may obtain. The battle sometimes grows long and often seems insurmountable. We cannot just sit back and let God do the work. No, he wills for us to lift our hearts to him, to unite our wills with his, to seek his grace; in short, to allow him to transform us. To accomplish this, he needs an opening – space in our lives to work.

Thus Christ exhorts us in the gospel: “pray always, without becoming weary”. And in the second reading, Saint Paul teaches us about persistence and perseverance from another angle: that of living out our faith and being true to what God has revealed. He has given us so much, from that passage across the “Red Sea” in baptism to other sacraments that strengthen us along our journey; from his grace, which makes it possible to live the way he commands, to the examples and intercession of his many saints, who assure us that his way is possible. Whether we are a Simon of Cyrene or a soldier in the battle, our duty is to persevere in prayer, so that his victory may finally be manifest in us – so that we may enter the promised land of Heaven.