

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C)

16<sup>th</sup> October 2022

'Pray Continually: Marian Prayer & Pilgrimage'

Exod 17: Moses persevering in prayer for Israel      Ps 120: *Let him sleep not, your guard.*  
2Tim 3-4: *refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience ... with patience*  
Lk 18:1-8: *pray continually and never lose heart.*

The loving challenge of the Lord today in the Gospel is: *pray continually and never lose heart!* It's a straightforward message, and a direct one. Pray! Don't give up on praying. Make sure it's a part of your every day ... a part of who you are: your most intimate relationship, that with the God who made you.

When we pray, we are not trying to change God's mind about something, about His loving us, or His giving us the best ... As Jesus says in the parable, contrasting the all-loving, perfect God to the dishonest judge, He reminds us that He will never give us anything but the best. He knows what is good for us, "He will see justice done, and done speedily." His relationship with us, in other words, is utterly faithful and loyal — completely dependable. And this means that though we are less than totally faithful to Him, we can trust that God is always attentive to us. We need have no fears that when we turn to God He will assist

us in our necessities. But of course in order best to understand His will, to know what is good for us, and to stay on course for heaven, we have to act in ways that demonstrate our love for God. If we say we pray, but our lives are actually far from Him, then no wonder we will have difficulty seeing that He is acting for our good. If we are neglectful of God, ceasing to pray, staying away from the regular worship of Him, or ignoring our neighbour, then it's likely that we will not see how God answers our prayers. Only when our minds and hearts are attuned with His will are we going to see how He works continually in our lives for our good.

Sometimes God's answer will mean we must wait, patiently, expectantly, longingly for something — the Lord asking to expand our hearts in our desire for Him as we wait. Sometimes things will simply be denied us ... things we thought we should have, or deserve. But the Lord sees the whole picture, and knows how to bring about what is better for us. Sometimes, it is simply our sins and wrongdoing that thwart the better thing from happening,

and we need to repent of those and seek the Lord's forgiveness. But in whatever circumstance, let's not lose heart. The Lord Jesus is the passionate lover of our souls, desiring only what brings us closer to Him and to heaven; and He will simply not will anything that leads away from Him, even if that is what we think we want.

One of the most powerful ways in which to “*pray continually and never lose heart,*” and to align your heart gently and persuasively towards the plan of God for you, is to **pray the Rosary**. This ancient Marian prayer, which we have especial devotion to in October, month of the Holy Rosary, is a tried-and-tested devotion, going back to St Dominic in the 12<sup>th</sup> c., if not earlier. The genius of this long-standing Catholic prayer is that at one and the same time there's a whole series of levels on which we pray it:

- (i) the level of **the sacred words** of the *Our Father*, and the *Hail Mary*, and the *Glory Be*: traditional prayers which the Church has taught us and placed before us as perennially good for us to recite;
- (ii) the level of **the holy mysteries** which are prayed: joyful, luminous, sorrowful, glorious, aspects of the life of Our

Blessed Lord, interwoven with the life and vocation of His Holy Mother;

- (iii) the level of **the intention** for which we might offer that individual decade, e.g. as we pray the ‘Carrying of the Cross,’ to pray for those suffering illness, or as we pray the ‘Presentation of the Child Jesus’ to pray for those we are sponsors or godparents to.
- (iv) and then there's the level on which it is a **meditation**: the peaceful, repetitive mantra which in itself is a prayer of simply placing oneself in the presence of God, and trustfully invoking Our Lady's intercession.

The Rosary operates on all these levels at once, and is therefore an ideal prayer for many different settings: on one's own, sitting quietly alone, or when walking along (Gower St), or on the tube, or in the university corridor between lectures; or just as suitable for praying in common, together in Church, for example as we do each Sunday in May & October before Mass: or as last night when I joined with others on Zoom to be united in praying the Rosary with a friend dying from cancer, in her hospital room. I always feel that the regular use of the Rosary, its

sense of continuity with ancient Church practice, and its meditative mantra-like repetition, helps us truly to adopt that necessary attitude of ‘praying continually and never losing heart.’ And also because the ‘Mother of the Holy Rosary,’ Mary, had just this same attitude. She it is who, through this Rosary named after her, and commended to us by her so many times — in apparitions in Lourdes, Fatima, and other places — nurtures us in this unswerving prayer of devotion and trust in the Lord’s goodness.

Maybe you’re surprised that your university chaplain is urging you, 21<sup>st</sup>-c. bright young things, modern-day Catholics, to such an ancient practice as the Rosary! But every practice of the Christian life and prayer is essentially timeless, just as Our Lord Jesus is timeless and is the Saviour of all ages and all peoples. The Rosary — like the Mass, and the other Catholic Sacraments, and the praying of the Jewish psalms — is as relevant and right for the London university student of 2022 as it was for St Dominic and his students in the ancient university in Bologna in 1222 (well, 1221 ... he died in 1221!). So, I urge you, take

up your rosaries again this month, especially if you have difficulty knowing how to start praying — it’s an easy way in, and yet a profound one. If you have no rosary, or haven’t one in London, then please just take one from here in front of the altar, and a rosary card to help or remind you how to pray the rosary. Mary always leads us to Jesus; she never gets in the way, and gently in the Rosary she takes us by the hand and guides us through the Christian mysteries to unite ourselves to her divine Son.

I have another proposal to make to you for this month of October, and that’s a mini-pilgrimage with us to a shrine of Our Lady, next Saturday! This would be a great and holy (and fun!) thing to do, a month in to term — just what you need, to get out of the city for a change. It’s very easy: we’ll travel by coach door-to-door, from outside Newman House next Saturday, 9am, to the Carmelite shrine called ‘The Friars’ at Aylesford in Kent. Some of you have been before; many of you may not have been. The Carmelite friars, whose mediaeval origins were on Mt Carmel, near the Mediterranean Sea at Haifa (not that far

from Nazareth), came to Aylesford as one of the first places they settled when they were forced to leave the Holy Land because it was becoming unsafe for Christians to remain. 1242 was the year they came to establish a friary at Aylesford; and even though they were forced out in 1538 because of the religious turmoil under King Henry viii, they were happily able to return in 1949. (My Mum was actually there for one of the earliest big Masses in the 1950s when it was restored!) So, what centuries of history and prayer the shrine is built on, and what a special place it holds in the hearts of many people, myself included! We would go there as a family once a month on a Sunday afternoon, come rain or shine, when I was little and we lived nearby. It's a place that I, and others too, associate strongly with our vocation to serve the Lord as priests.

Carmelite friars having as patroness Our Blessed Lady, Aylesford is naturally a place of special *Marian* devotion, with an outdoor tree-lined 'Rosary Way' constructed around the perimeter, and a great statue of Our Lady of the Assumption at the centre of the outside piazza

altar. I suggest that it would really be a great way to offer Our Lady a day for prayer *to* her and *with* her in this her month of October, month of the Rosary. Pilgrimage — a journey for prayer and brief retreat from the world — is a key part of the Christian experience, and it's something that as a Chaplaincy we like to promote, to widen your horizons of prayer, friendship and Catholic practice. So — I'll be giving you directions after Mass as to how you can book and pay to come, all of which should be done today before you leave Newman House, to guarantee a place.

Let's be reminded, then, of Our Lord's Gospel instruction to us, in which simple daily Rosary and occasional Pilgrimage take their rightful and natural place, physical expressions of our desire to respond with love to that divine initiative: *pray continually and never lose heart!* Be Catholics solid in your prayer life, your self-offering to Jesus with His Blessed Mother. Don't shrug off that request from Jesus's heart to be continually in prayer relationship with Him ... He desires it; He desires You to be close. Let's give Him what He asks.