

29th Sunday (C)

19th October 2025

‘Pray Continually: top tips for Prayer’

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: *always pray and [do] not lose heart.*

The Scriptures at Sunday Mass generally have this feature, quite deliberate, that the 1st Reading from the OT is linked thematically to the Gospel passage of the day. Not so, the 2nd Reading, which continues on a parallel track, semi-continuously. But the 1st Reading is chosen from across the vast sweep of the OT to echo in some way the Gospel passage which itself is semi-continuous (Lk 18 this week and next; Lk 19 the week after ... except that it will be All Saints’ Day). What’s the link, then, between Our Lord’s parable of the ‘unjust judge and the importunate widow’ and the slaughter of the Amalekites at Rephidim in Ex 17? Well, with some thought, the connecting theme seems to be *persistence* ... persistence in prayer. Moses is helped by Aaron & Hur to continue his long-drawn-out intercession, his hands uplifted in prayer, on behalf of Joshua waging war against the enemy Amalekites; whilst in the Gospel the key phrase is: *always ... pray and [do] not lose heart!*

Perhaps a key regret of many a Christian is “I do not pray enough,” or “I need to learn to pray better.” Well, the good news is that each year in February we have a wonderful ‘Week of Guided Prayer’ when we give you that very chance to pray better: you get 5 days of 30 mins/day with a 1–1 prayer guide, and I know how just a single WGP can work wonders in someone’s prayer life. 70+ of you take part in this each year; you can look forward to this in the 1st week of February next, and I urge you to take up that great opportunity. But I’m not going to defer this theme of personal prayer until then! — it’s too important for that. Let’s think of some ‘top tips for prayer’ now, that you can already put in to practice *this term*.

- (i) **Make sure that prayer happens!** We need to make time for *communal* prayer, and we need to make time for *private* prayer. These are the two poles of prayer; both are necessary, they complement one another. *Prayer is our relationship with God*. Without ongoing prayer, we can hardly be said to be in right relationship with God, and would be disconnected from our Maker; in other words, without prayer we will naturally feel ‘all at sea.’

So, as Christians we must make prayer a priority. Let's not keep 'kicking the can down the street' and putting off a concerted effort to pray consistently.

- (ii) **Communal Prayer** will include the hour of Sunday Mass each week, but cannot be restricted to that bare minimum *starvation diet*! Weekday Mass is that added offering of prayer to God, a gift of 30 mins in the day. Of course there is no greater prayer than the Mass, as it is Jesus's self-offering to the Father that we are caught up into when we are present for Mass, uniting ourselves with His perfect sacrifice. If you are not yet in the habit of coming to weekday Mass, I challenge you to decide on at least 1 day of each week that you can make it (here, or elsewhere). This term has already been better for weekday Mass attendance, but let's make it even better! Don't dismiss this as an unreasonable imposition on your time; it's not — it's important and it's life-giving.
- (iii) **Private Prayer** complements the Communal Prayer of the Church, and flows out of that liturgical prayer and prepares us for it. So, for example, even just praying quietly before or after Mass is a natural act of humility and thanksgiving that helps us position ourselves rightly

with respect to the intimate presence of the living God in the liturgy. But we also need to find other times in the day to pray privately. First, we need to find a *time*; then we need to find a *place*. Timing is very much a personal decision, determined by your timetable and your temperament. What time for prayer suits you best? This will be different to the next person. Don't try to mimic another's prayer schedule just because you admire them; *you have to find what works for you*. But don't put off that discernment: when's best, morning, noon, evening, night? ... to find time that you can set aside, properly, phone off, quiet and undisturbed. As for place, well, that's again quite personal. Some find it best to be at ease in their room, a safe and comfortable environment; others — myself included — prefer to come into a chapel space, a physical entering into prayer. *This chapel is open to you* pretty much every weekday, 9am to 8pm; just come by, and the Receptionist will admit you. A good number of other local Catholic churches, perhaps nearer your residence, are likewise open throughout the daytime: oases of peace and God's presence, waiting for you to come. In whatever way, place or time you do so,

you definitely need to make prayer a daily event!

- (iv) **Persistence.** Well, this is the key word, isn't it? — exemplified by Our Lord's mandate and His mini-parable about the persistent widow who keeps on at the judge; and also by the remarkable feat of stamina of Moses with Aaron & Hur raising up his hands in prayer, the traditional *orans* position. Even if we feel tempted to give up finding time to pray, reluctant to put our phones down and even bother, or feel we've too much to do to 'waste time' (so to speak) praying — then we need to hear those words of Jesus: persist, "*pray and do not lose heart.*" It's always worth going through that barrier of reluctance or and distraction, and 'forcing ourselves' to be at prayer. The devil desires nothing of us more than to start giving up on our prayer time, as this is the thin end of the wedge for dividing us from the heavenly Father. *Do not succumb.* Even if it's hard — or, *especially* when it's hard and we feel least like it, or most tempted to skip prayer time — that's when to settle to prayer is probably most urgently needed and most fruitful! *Pray continuously and never lose heart!*

- (v) **Adoration.** For me, and for many Catholics, a very

helpful setting for prayer is to come and be in the presence of the Holy Eucharist exposed. Of course, Our Blessed Lord is present here in the Tabernacle at all times, day and night. But when the Blessed Sacrament is placed on the altar for Adoration there is a special dignity afforded Him, that invites prayer and adoration. So, think of using the times of Exposition of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist as times to aim at being here (or any church) for prayer, especially if that's not something you've yet tried. Here at NH that's Sundays 6–7pm and Tuesdays 6–9pm every week. As young St Carlo Acutis was wont to say: being in the sunshine gives one a tan; being at Adoration, one bathes in the rays of the Blessed Sacrament and makes one a saint.

- (vi) **Scripture.** A key part of prayer is the reading of Sacred Scripture. Not in the way one reads a novel or an academic text, which might be skim-reading, or rapidly and without word-for-word attention. The reading of Scripture in prayer time needs to be in the style of *lectio divina*, that is, a slow and meditative reading, pausing regularly, perhaps a mere few verses, allowing the Spirit to bring out the spiritual sense of the verses and its rich

message for the soul. Many will find that this use of Scripture is a rich source of inspiration for prayer time; it certainly gives one a great starting point.

(vii) **Rosary.** In this month of October, it's vital to mention another rich vein of prayer, a Christian staple, namely the Holy Rosary, whose tradition goes back to St Dominic in the 13th c. if not much further. A simple prayer, a repetitive one, a mantra almost, of repeated Hail Marys, which acts as a vehicle for meditating on the mysteries of Our Lord's life interwoven with Our Lady's. The Rosary is a perfect prayer for the domestic setting, or for quiet late-night meditation; for journeying, walking, hiking even; and for invoking the powerful intercession of our heavenly Mother who herself in apparitions such as Lourdes and Fatima has specifically endorsed the Rosary. I'm sure most of you Catholics have a Rosary somewhere; don't leave it neglected in its nice box!

(viii) **Pilgrimage.** A final setting for promoting prayer is the *Pilgrimage*, be it an ambitious one such as some of went on this Jubilee year in Rome with Pope Leo, or a simple day-pilgrimage to some local shrine. A pilgrimage always involves that effort of journeying for prayer at a

holy place. We have just such a pilgrimage next w/e, Sat 25th, to the shrine of the *very first English martyr*, St Alban, martyred in the 3rd c., a place of pilgrimage for English Christians ever since. I strongly encourage you to experience this act of devotion and prayer on Saturday, to express together with fervour as a committed student body our love for the saints of this Isle in which we live. It's a beautiful part of our prayer life to journey to an ancient site sanctified down the centuries by the prayers of so many other Christian pilgrims, and to stand where they stood, in solidarity with them and in love with the same Jesus who has blessed them — and blesses us with them — in one and the same holy Church.

The Lord will, He promises, answer our prayers in the way which He knows to be best; “*He will give justice to them speedily.*” What we need to do is to have that love and persistence to keep asking, to keep praying, to keep devotedly making the time to speak to Our Lord, be in His holy presence, seek out His company in patience and stillness. Only in this way can we ever hope to “*listen to the voice of the Lord and enter in to His peace.*”