

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 20, 2019

*“Today some of my efforts will end in failure. Other things which I neither want nor expect, will happen. People will get on my nerves. My own foolishness in some things will annoy me. These are the trials of everyday life. These are my opportunities for virtue. My spiritual greatness or littleness is seen on these occasions.” (Confraternity of the Precious Blood, **My Daily Bread**, p. 355-356)*

Our first reading, *Exodus 17:8-13*, describes one particular battle between Israel and the Amalekites. The Amalekites were the ancient people who controlled the trade routes between Arabia and Egypt. They would become a perennial enemy of Israel until the reign of Hezekiah (*1 Chronicles 4:43*). Many early Church Fathers would see, in this event, a prefiguration of the saving actions of Jesus who, on the wood of the cross (a symbol of the rod of Moses) won victory over death and Satan (symbolized by the Amalekites). Holding true to the notion of this battle being a symbol for another event, I would like to offer you another explanation which might resonate for all.

Let us begin by suggesting this battle and its participants represent the whole of our earthly lives. The battle is not for a piece of land which could provide food and water. Rather, it is a continuous battle waged for our soul. It begins with the sunrise (our birth) and ends at sunset (our death). If you notice, the battle rages throughout the entire day (our lives) without a break. The two armies are Israel (God, virtue, etc.) and Amalek (Satan, vice, etc.). To see the battle clearly, Moses must ascend the mountain. For you and I to also see our battle clearly, we must ascend the mountain of self-reflective prayer. Like Moses, we too will get tired. And, also like Moses we will need support. For Moses, this support came from Aaron and Hur supporting his arms and a rock allowing him a place of comfort. We too are provided by God supports for our battle. We may not have Aaron and Hur, but we do have the priests, the sacraments, and each other. Our rock is now this Rock, our Church which provides us a place of rest and comfort. As the battle raged on, Moses held aloft the wooden rod infused with the power of God. We hold aloft the wood of the cross infused with the power of God through the blood of His Son. Finally, as Israel was victorious in the end, so we too can be victorious in the end.

Allow me to represent this passage of Exodus to you using these new examples. Our earthly life is a battle. It began the day we took our first breath. It is a spiritual battle for our souls between the forces of God and the forces of the Devil. We are weak. We will require help. God has provided this necessary help when He commissioned His Church, with her ministers, sacraments, Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Most importantly, He has given the cross of His Son. Jesus died upon the wood of the cross, that we might be victorious over Satan and live with God for all eternity in Heaven. It is only those who are willing to ascend the mountain of prayer, who will see how their battle has progressed. This leaves us with one truly important point - none of us will be able to win the battle of eternal life without the dedicated trek up the mountain of self-reflective prayer. We must examine ourselves, our thoughts, words, and deeds, each day. Battle lines and formations can change at any given moment. It is the elevated, reflective person who can respond to these changes and, with the assistance provided by God, find victory and eternal rest.