

Vocations Retreat Homily “Perseverance in Prayer”
Saturday of the 32nd Week of Ordinary Time

Bishop Frank Schuster

For a retreat that involves an all-night vigil before the Blessed Sacrament, can you ask for a more perfect Gospel reading than the one that begins: “Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary”?

The parable is funny. We have a judge who didn’t fear God or respect his fellow man who renders a just decision, not because it is the right thing to do, but because he was tired of being bugged to death. I was in Baltimore last week for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. And so, the first thought I had was, “Man, that judge reminds me of some bishops I know”. To be clear, I am not referring to any bishops in Region XII!

The parable speaks in a humorous way how bold we can be with our prayer to God. God is perfect, so God does not fear. God knows the end of the story. What is the end of the story? The end of the story is Jesus is victorious. I mention that because of how often we approach God with our fears, fear about the world today, fear about what is going on in my life, or fear about my future. This is of course appropriate to do, as every spiritual director will tell you, it is important to be honest with God and to bring him all our fears like the psalmists of old. Count how many psalms can qualify as a prayer containing some measure of fear about something. What makes bringing to God our fears so therapeutic is the consolation he can give us; namely, his son Jesus is victorious. Have no fear about the future.

In contrast to the judge, God is not bugged by our constant intercessions. That comes with being omnipotent and all loving. Persevering in constant prayer isn’t about changing God. Persevering in constant prayer is more about changing me. The more I pray, the more I get insight into God’s will for me. Which is to say, the more I pray, I come to know God better as I get to know myself better. This is my take on what St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13. “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully as I am fully known.”

When it comes to discerning our vocation, let me give you a spoiler alert. If God places before you: door A, door B and door C, the spoiler alert is that God is behind every door. He can make something beautiful about any choice we make. To be clear, our free will matters to God. He made us in his image and likeness. That is why he won’t make our decisions for us. However, God does have a preference. That is what we mean by “the call”. Perseverance in prayer will help illuminate that preference he has for us and will give us the courage to walk through the best door he has in mind for us, whether it is to priesthood, marriage, religious life, our career choice, the list goes on. These are adult decisions because at some point you can’t open one door without closing the other doors. Perseverance in prayer offers us peace.

However, I want to focus our attention now to the last question we hear from our Lord in our Gospel reading this morning. He asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” That question should haunt us. On the one hand, this question illuminates what God values when it comes to our lifelong decisions. He isn’t interested in our 401k accounts, the cars we drive, the houses we own, achievements or Nobel Prize awards. The only thing Jesus is interested in is, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” At a retreat such as this, let me be bold and say the only person in the world who can answer that question is you. No matter which preferred door God leads you to, whether it is to one that is commonly chosen or the road less travelled, the only person who can answer that question of whether “when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth” is you. And we answer that question each day in the manner we are true to the vocation God calls us to. This only happens if we persevere in prayer.

And so, on behalf of the People of God, thank you for being here for this discernment retreat and opening your hearts to the Lord. The Good news is, whatever burdens your heart, whatever fears you have about the future, you are not alone. You belong to a family of faith. We call that Church. As a family in faith, we are in this thing called life together. We journey in faith in a way that is confusing and at times frustrating to the world we live in. Why? This is because we live as a people who know the end of the story. No matter what happens in life, Jesus will be victorious.