

Year C Oct. 17, 2010 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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This Sunday we are called to persevere in prayer. The readings are simple enough. Amalek was a great enemy of Israel (see Dt 25:17-19), and is listed as being among the powerful nations that so terrified Israel when they explored the Promised Land, Nm 13:25-33. In fact, the whole time Israel wasted in the wilderness was the result of their fear and lack of faith in God who told them to go and take the land, they were already there; see Nm 14; Dt 1. So our first reading is about faith and perseverance in prayer, physically represented by keeping one's hands up even if it means having others hold them up (similarly to the paralytic in Mk 2 whose friends carry him atop the roof, and whose faith Jesus sees). Note that Ex 17:15-16 speaks of Yahweh's "banner" as a symbol of his perpetual war with "Amalek." Amalek thus represents evil, and the "banner" (in Hebrew, *nes*) is the same word as the "pole" on which the bronze serpent that healed was to be placed, Nm 21:8; Jn 3:14-15.

The psalm pictures a prayerful person in distress, looking far away to the mountains for help from the Lord. Yahweh was a God of the mountain, and the mountains are proof of the power of God who made heaven and earth. God neither slumbers nor sleeps; we imitate his divine life by persevering in prayer, even when we are tired and fall asleep; Thérèse of Lisieux was often sleepy at prayer, but she trusted that God was a loving Father who looked with kindness and pleasure at his sleeping children.

The Gospel parable shows a rather pushy widow, able to drive a corrupt judge nuts with her pestering. Teresa of Avila experienced a definitive change from her tepidity and inability to really commit to God through an act of persevering prayer. She tells us that one day, upon entering the oratory and seeing a very wounded image of Jesus, her heart was rent by how badly she had reciprocated those wounds. She threw herself down before it with a great flood of tears and pleaded that he once for all strengthen her to not offend him anymore. "I think I told him then that I would not get up from there until he did what I pleaded" (*Life* 9,3). When she would retell this story to her friends, she would always add: "I insisted and it worked" ("*Porfié y valióme*").¹

¹ Efrén de la Madre de Dios – Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa* (Madrid: BAC, 1977²), 146; the last quote is from Ana María de Jesús, *Proc. Avila* 1610, 9.^o