

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time



*The Lord is your guardian; the Lord is your shade;
he is beside you at your right hand.
The sun shall not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will guard you from all evil;
he will guard your life.
The Lord will guard your coming and your going,
both now and forever."*

We come together to sing out these words of praise and trust in this Sunday's readings as we recite Psalm 121—traditionally a blessing bestowed upon someone about to embark on a dangerous journey. The Psalmist notes that God is not confined to a place or time, that every step is guarded, and that God watches over every movement, day and night. We are each on a similar journey requiring faith, trust, humility, and prayerful connection with the One who gives us life.

Bill Wilson, a pioneer of modern 12-step recovery, wrote extensively about the spiritual solution to our shared condition of addiction and unhealthy attachments. While commenting on what we are to expect along the journey we've embarked on, recovery literature notes, "All of us, without exception, pass through times when we can pray only with the greatest exertion of will. Occasionally we go even further than this. We are seized with a rebellion so sickening that we simply won't pray" (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 105).

What route should we take when prayer dries up and a connection with our Lord seems challenging? As people in recovery, we might be tempted to fall back on old behaviors and ideas upon slowly losing heart. We are to remain attentive to the misuse of our own willpower, which we can force upon our problems when not aligned with God's intentions for us. A return to prayer should be guided by the desire to know God's will for us and for the power to carry it out (Step 11). We ought to be alarmed when it becomes a plea for God to bend His will toward our own.

Saint Paul suggests a return to scripture for prayerful inspiration in this Sunday's second reading (2 Timothy 3:14-15):

*Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed,
because you know from whom you learned it,
and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures,
which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation
through faith in Christ Jesus.*

The power of prayer is described uniquely in each of the readings this Sunday, beginning with a scene involving Moses and the people of Israel who are under attack by Amalek. "Conscious contact with God," in this case, is symbolized by Moses keeping his hands raised toward God (Exodus 17:11-13):

*As long as Moses kept his hands raised up,
Israel had the better of the fight,
but when he let his hands rest,
Amalek had the better of the fight.
Moses' hands, however, grew tired;
so they put a rock in place for him to sit on.
Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands,
one on one side and one on the other,
so that his hands remained steady till sunset.
And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people
with the edge of the sword.*

Notice how Moses, the leader of the Israelites, relies on the help of his fellows to keep reaching out for God. This is true of our journey and the spiritual battles we face, keeping in mind that, "Our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Ephesians 6:12). We are not alone, even when we feel alone. We give thanks for "a design for living that really works" and the sacramental grace to remain close to God (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 28). He is our guardian, our shade. He will guard us from all evil, He will guard our life. He will guard our recovery journey, both now and forever.

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- When have you felt guarded and protected by God during your recovery journey?
- What helps you stay faithful in prayer when you feel disconnected or discouraged?
- How can you let others “hold up your hands” when you grow weary in your healing work?

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First Reading: Exodus 17:8-13

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8