

The western culture was once one of great hope – we built magnificent cathedrals which pointed up to God, we composed beautiful music about heaven and the mysteries of God, we gave generously of our time to help others, and we studied what it means to be truly human, what it is to be body and spirit. But this culture which thrived under Catholic Christianity has fallen out from under the West, and we are left with a culture of despair. The church is under attack from within and without – from those inside the Church who no longer believe, from priests and bishops and lay teachers who no longer teach the true faith, and from without by the secular culture which sees no need for God and which no longer respects the dignity of life from conception to natural death. And this leads many to give up on God, and when we give up on God, we rely on ourselves... and this is why we have so much despair in our society – the burden becomes too much when we cannot hand it over, when we cannot hope in anything beyond ourselves.

The readings tonight remind us not to despair – for God is faithful to those who trust in Him. In the story of Exodus, the Israelites have just escaped the harsh life in Egypt, and now they are at war with the Amelikes. This are surrounded by disaster, but in the midst of this God gives them what they need. They cry to him because they are hungry and thirsty, and he sends them bread from heaven, meat from the quails, and water from the Rock. The Lord provides... and here in this fight with the Amelikes the Lord tells Moses to keep that if he keeps his arms up, they will win the war. The Israelites cannot rely on themselves, they are outnumbered, they have just been living in the desert with not much food, and they have not had time to build great weapons. And yet, God promises them that while Moses arms remain raised, they will win. And it is interesting that he needs the help of the priest and laymen, Aaron and Hur. This is a sign of the Church, that we are given the assistance of the priests and our fellow Catholics in the struggle to remain faithful to God.

And then we move into the Gospel where we have this parable about the persistent woman. This judge doesn't care about her or God, so she doesn't have much chance of getting what she wants. He keeps denying her what she requests, and yet she keeps hoping against hope. This is not suggesting that if we really want some material thing, and we keep asking God for it, that we will be given it. If we keep asking to be wealthy, or to have great health, or to get the perfect job, God doesn't promise these things. He promises us justice. And the justice of God has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ... where he comes to pay for our sins, where he comes to reconcile us to the Father, where he comes to give us a new life. If we feel like God does not hear our prayers, we only need to look to the cross, where we see Jesus who keeps his hands raised up for us. The cross is always this sign that God is with us, that even in death when Jesus cries out to the Father "why have you forsaken me", God is not absent. Because if we wait patiently like Mary did, we will receive Jesus again, we will receive new life.

Despite God's promise, despite the fact that he keeps proving himself faithful... Jesus says "Will there be any left who believe in me when the Son of Man comes?" This is the question that Jesus asks each of us... Even though your life is difficult, even though many around you have fallen away, will you remain faithful to me? And each of us must answer this question that God asks us by the way we live. If we keep praying, keep coming to Mass every Sunday, doing our best to keep the teachings of the Church, and asking forgiveness when we fail, then we can be people of hope. Because God promises to see justice done, and the justice for one who seeks God in their life is that he finds Him. It is not that our lives will be easy, but that we will have God with us. And knowing this makes us free, because the world doesn't depend on us... but we are free to be Sons of our Father, receiving all things in life from Him. Do not lose hope.