**29 OT-C1 “Columbo”**

We need a detective to figure out today's gospel! My memory goes back to the TV detective Columbo. Each week he would wander around with his little notepad chasing down questions until he figured out the case. In Colombo’s spirit let's figure out this gospel.

Here's the problem, Jesus tells a parable about the necessity for us to pray always without becoming weary. How are we supposed to do that? Jesus can't be talking about us constantly running “Hail Marys” in our heads. Intuitively we know he is talking about something deeper than this. A clue is found in his parable.

Note that Jesus tells us to pay attention to what the judge says, not what the widow does which is where our attention normally goes. The judge says, “I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.” The judge acts in his own self-interest.

We need to focus therefore on God's self-interest. Another name for this is “God's will.”

So, what is God's will when it comes to us? Classic catechism: we are created to know, love, and serve God in this life and to be happy eternally with him in heaven. God’s will that we be in relationship with him.

What does this have to do with praying always? Praying always means being attentive to God always. It is more than just a prayer we recite; it is an orientation or an awareness we are called to constantly foster and expand.

Jesus teaches that the Great Commandment is to love the Lord our God with all your mind, all your heart, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. In terms of attentiveness this translates into love the Lord your God with all your mind (be attentive to God through study), all your heart (be attentive to God through worship), and all your strength (be attentive to God through service), and love your neighbor as yourself (be attentive to God through your attentiveness to your neighbor for God chooses to get to us through us). Saying constant “Hail Marys” would probably be easier!

There is a scene from the movie, “The Passion of Christ,” that comes to my mind. It is the scene at the moment when Jesus surrenders his Spirit to the Father from the cross at Calvary. The earthquakes, lightning strikes, the temple tapestry is ripped in two, and there is a camera shot of Satan screaming from a pit where he is now chained.

Theologically this scene speaks to the reality that when Jesus sacrifices his life for us on the cross, death itself is destroyed... the dead-end result of our sin (death) becomes our new passageway to eternal life.

The scene also captures the reality that now Satan has only one way to keep us from God, only one way to thwart God's will to be in relationship with us. All Satan can now do is distract us from our relationship with God - distract, preoccupy, despair, and deter our attention. These are now Satan’s tools.

Why does Satan do this? Because Satan knows that if we are constantly attentive to God in our life, we will discover that God is there for us in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. We will discover that God is faithful, and our trust in God's reliability will grow.

Remember what Pope Francis called trust in God's reliability; he calls it “faith.” This explains the Gospel's closing question, “Will the Son of Man find faith on earth?” If we foster a constant awareness of God in our lives, if we “pray always,” then faith will grow as our relationship with God deepens.

Mother Teresa once said, “*Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at his disposition, and listening to his voice in the depths of our hearts.*”

Stay attentive!