

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Remember Amalek!

Remember Amalek! These two words were written on the tomb of an unknown Jewish man who was killed during an antisemitic riot in Paris in 1956. Remember Amalek!

The admonition refers to the Amalekites, the fierce fighters of this Sunday's first reading. Every nation of the Middle East was afraid of them. No nation could withstand them. Israel could not defeat them, at least not alone. But with Moses' hands raised in prayer to the God of Israel, with Aaron and Hur holding Moses' hands up, with the forces of God on the side of Israel, not only was Amalek defeated, this fierce nation was totally destroyed. By Jesus' time, Amalek was merely a memory from the past.

Remember Amalek! There is nothing impossible with God. There are no enemies too strong for the forces of the new Israel. Remember Amalek! God fights with his people against the forces of evil, the forces that would destroy the presence of his people upon the earth.

Remember Amalek, and don't give up. So, we have a real problem with our temper. We've tried every dynamic known to get out of situations where we normally explode. And we've been successful for the last few months. And then someone who knows us a bit too well pushes the wrong button and out comes the venom. When the volcano stops erupting and the lava is cleaned up, we feel horrible. We are upset with ourselves, but we also know that we were pushed into the anger. Now is when we have the choice: "Do I keep fighting my anger or do I decide that if anyone says this or that to me, they will have to suffer the consequences. Maybe this temper is more than I can handle. Maybe this is who I am and others have to learn to deal with me." Don't! Don't give in. Remember Amalek! God can help us resume the fight. We need to keep our hands high. The Christian community is praying for us and with us. It is supporting us, holding our arms up as we pray. The Church is our Aaron and Hur. Pray for help. Don't give up. The fiercest enemies will fall. Remember Amalek!

So, we are fighting an addiction to alcohol, or porn, or drugs, or sex, or gambling, or whatever. Let's say it's alcohol. We are a member of AA. We attend weekly meetings. Sometimes even more than one a week. We have our own mechanisms we use to deal with various situations where people have a drink in hand. We have sparkling mineral water with lime or we drink non alcoholic beer. We have been sober for five years and are pretty happy with ourselves. We are deeply indebted to God for helping us fight the addiction. And then everything in life comes down on us. We lose our job. There are problems in the home. We fail a course in school. We break up with our girlfriend or boyfriend. Our marriage is in trouble. One of our parents is sick. So we figure, "This is an extreme situation. One drink won't hurt. It'll take the edge off." We deceive ourselves. Of course, we can't stop at one. Then when the two or three six packs are finished, or the bottle is drained, we wake up in the morning, and sober up, and are angrier with ourselves than we have ever been. We can't stand the fact that we are back to square one. It is right here that we have a

choice: trust in God and start over, or give up. It is easy to give up. It is easy to decide that the addiction is more than we will ever be able to handle. It is easy to give up. Don't. Remember Amalek! We need to trust in God, continue to pray and do your best. The enemies of his people, your enemies, will be defeated. It might take AA buddies to hold up your arms in prayer. It may take a whole parish full of committed Christians to hold us up in prayer. Just don't give up, no matter what! Persevere in prayer. Put up the fight. Remember Amalek! Those fierce fighters were defeated by the Hebrews who prayed and fought, and who had God on their side.

Earlier this year I saw a movie set in a small village in Scotland. It was about an ex convict and the teenage sister that he was raising. He had gone to prison for a violent crime, but was released after seven years, when his parents died in a car accident and his sister was only thirteen. He had served most of his sentence and the prison officials were very pleased not just with his avoiding trouble, but with the fact that he had sincerely embraced religion. He was an ardent evangelical Christian. When he left prison to take care of his sister, he immediately joined a group of determined Christians. He had prayer meetings over his parents' home, now his and his sister's home. He took over his father's job. He did his best to be loving and kind to his sister. It was all new to him, being both big brother and father, but he prayed for her and asked his prayer friends to continue to support him, to help him hold his hands up in prayer. She, on the other hand, wanted nothing to do either with his new found religious life or with his determination to get her to join him in prayer. She was going through a lot of her own problems. She had just lost her mother and father. She felt her brother was domineering her. She knew how to get him upset. He panicked when she ran away from home, even though she was nearby at a girl friend's house. She came back during one of his prayer meetings and kicked up a fuss when he told her to go to her room and stay there. She yelled and screamed from her room and was horrible, vulgar and obscene. He finally had enough, and went up to her room to try to reason with her. She got worst. He lost it. He hit her. Then he gave up. He went down to the prayer meeting and threw all his friends out of his house, literally and physically. He threw out his cross, bibles, etc. He decided that he was a violent man and God couldn't help him. He forgot about Amalek. He gave up.

When I saw that movie, I said, "I've been there. I know that feeling. The feeling that somehow or other, I am not that good. I will never be good enough." I know the feeling that says, "I should just give up." I know the temptation to forget what God did to the Amalekites when Moses refused to give up.

Perhaps you have been there too. Perhaps you also know the temptation to give up and give in. Perhaps you also think that there are times you are too weak to continue the fight for the Lord, which is really the fight for yourself, for your own spiritual life. These are the times in our lives when we are the weakest. These are the times in our lives when it is the easiest for the forces of evil outside of us and within us to dominate us. These are the times in our lives when we need prayer more than ever. Today's reading reassure us. Persist in prayer. A setback can lead to a strengthening, a knowledge of a new situation that needs to be avoided. A revelation that God is

infinitely stronger than you are or than I am. He will not give up on me or on you. We can't give up on ourselves.

With the help of Aaron and Hur, Moses persevered in prayer and Joshua defeated the forces that were attacking the people of Israel. It was really God who defeated the Amalekites. Not Joshua. It is really God who will defeat our enemies, not us. We just need to keep praying, trusting and doing our part to put up the good fight. Our community, the Christian Community, is helping us hold up our hands in prayer. Jesus has told us to persevere in prayer, and he will defeat the Amalekites, in whatever shape they take when they attack us.

"Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours." Mark 11:24