

2025 10 19 – homily series — Marks of Discipleship II - Perseverance _
Humility – Lk 18 1-8 _ persistent widow

Welcome to our fall Homily Series! We are so glad you are here and if you're new to St. Thomas, I'd love to meet you at the reception after Mass

SLIDE:

Marks of Discipleship
Perseverance & Humility

Today we begin part two of our “Marks of Discipleship” series. This week we'll focus on perseverance and next week on humility.

So why does a disciple of Jesus need perseverance? Well, first let's remember that a disciple is someone who intentionally follows a particular teacher, and in our case that teacher is Jesus of Nazareth. As students of Jesus, we commit to learning from his life and teachings, in hopes of becoming more like him.

SLIDE:

Perseverance: Persistence, Tenacity, Overcoming Obstacles

The word perseverance is defined in a variety of ways, such as

- persistence over time;
- tenacity despite setbacks; and
- overcoming obstacles to reach set goals.

Sometimes it means carrying on even though there is little to not evidence that one will succeed. And when we lack perseverance we become indifferent, we don't bother taking action, essentially we give up.

Let's keep this understanding of perseverance in mind as we reflect on Scripture.

In the Gospel Jesus shares a story about a persistent widow. She was seeking justice about a situation yet the judge, who was known for not being fair, kept refusing her petition. But this widow did not give up and eventually the judge grants her request. With this example, Jesus is trying to encourage his disciples to persevere, to not lose heart, to keep praying to God... for if a dishonest judge will deliver a just decision, imagine what will our loving God will do!

SLIDE:
Why Persevere?

So why did this widow, and why does a disciple — why do you and me — need perseverance?

1. To help us grow
2. To help us handle difficulties
3. To bless one another

SLIDE:
To help us grow

1. To help us grow

Christianity is not just saying “I’m a Christian,” but it is truly trying to practice the teachings of Jesus, and it is NOT an easy path. To be a Christian is a counter-cultural way of living — we are asked to do things like forgive our enemies, to live selflessly for others, and to put things like generosity and compassion above material wealth. Along this path of discipleship we often do not get what we want, though we typically find that we have what we need. But along our journeys God may ask us to change our hearts, to follow God’s will more than our own, and that can be challenging. When we try again each day to live this way, we persevere, we mature in our faith. It is the slow work of conversion, turning us toward love again and again, one day at a time. If we develop the virtue of perseverance we will grow into better versions of ourselves.

SLIDE:
To help us handle difficulties

2. To help us handle difficulties

Too often, we Christians find ourselves taken aback when adversity strikes. We lament, "Why me? I attend church and strive to be a good person. Why would God let me suffer?" Well... why not you? Why not me? Why do we assume we should be exempt from fully experiencing the human condition simply because we are Christians? The harsh reality is that we may actually suffer more at times because we are Christians, because we have chosen a path of self-denial, a path that demands we respond to the suffering in the world, a path that can lead to persecution. Look what happened to our teacher (Jesus). So the question is not "Will there be a storm?" rather it is "Am I prepared for it?" And how do we get ready for the storms of life? By cultivating perseverance, by facing even the minor challenges with trust in God. The more we acknowledge and accept our ultimate dependence on God for everything, the more adept we become at calling on God in our times of need. In doing so we become less fearful and more trusting. As we exercise our "perseverance muscles," we anchor ourselves in a faith that helps us handle the variety of difficulties we face throughout life.

SLIDE:

To bless one another

3. To bless one another

Perseverance is driven by a purpose. It requires effort toward an important goal. For Jesus, his purpose was to unveil the love of God. In doing so, he faced opposition, mockery, threats, and abandonment. Yet he was clear on his mission and he persevered, which has blessed the world immeasurably. So too can we bless one another by enduring the challenges that come with the callings in our lives. This could look very different from person to person, but the principle is the same. For example, maybe you are a caretaker for a loved one and it is physically and emotionally draining. It's not easy, but you know it is the purpose before you at this time of life, and your perseverance blesses your loved one. A totally different example is maybe you have a gift with music. There are sacrifices you make to afford the instrument, the lessons, and the time invested. Yet those who eventually get to hear your developed musicianship are blessed by your perseverance. Perseverance is about the long game, where we align with God's will and trust in the grace that is to follow. This is how we build the kingdom, how we bless one another.

You know there are many remarkable stories of perseverance I could share, like that of Nelson Mandela, who worked to end apartheid — a system of segregation and discrimination in South Africa. He spent 27 years in prison and after being released he became the first president of South Africa in 1994.

[DON'T AD LIB THIS PARAGRAPH. DON'T ELABORATE ON YOUR MARRIAGE]

Yet sometimes examples like these feel out of reach and so I'll tell you about an ordinary person — me. I've shared widely that many years ago I went to a counselor to help address issues in my troubled marriage. And for the first six months, my counselor focused on breaking through my defenses and rationalizations. I felt like giving up, but I recognized that my previous methods weren't effective, so I tried to remain humble and patient, hoping for gradual progress. What you may not know is that took me at least eight years — yes, eight long years — to make significant change in my life. Now, when you consider that it took me over 30 years to develop the dysfunctional patterns I had at that point, it makes sense that establishing healthier ones would require a considerable amount of time. And the truth is, I'm still on that journey. I still go to counseling today because there really is no “point of arrival” for us human beings. No one is perfect. And so it is with discipleship, it is an ongoing process. God will always challenge us and invite us into a deeper love. Each day, we have the opportunity to say yes to God, and that faithfulness requires perseverance.

SLIDE:

Homework: Reflect, Share, & Return

- 1) I invite you to reflect upon a time when you had to endure a situation that required either sacrifice or hardship (or both)... or that was met with obstacles... but it led to a greater good in time, blessing others.
- 2) Can you share that story of perseverance with someone else in our faith community? Maybe you do this over coffee at the reception. I suggest this

because it is so important that we support and encourage one another as we all run the race that is before us.

3) Return next week and bring a friend to hear what Fr. John has to share about humility. While perseverance keeps us moving forward, humility keeps us on the right path. Fr. John is going to offer us some great insights about that.

I'll close paraphrasing Paul's words from our second reading: Stay true to what you have been taught by Jesus and persevere, regardless of whether it is convenient or inconvenient.

May God's grace surround us always, Amen.