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A homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, October 19, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Exodus 17:8–13

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 121:1–8 | **Response:** Psalm 121:2

Gospel Acclamation: Hebrews 4:12

Gospel Reading: Luke 18:1–8

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The readings today are about the steadfastness of faith, the support we give and receive, and the call to be missionary disciples — to persist in hope, leaning not on our own strength, but bringing God's love into every corner of the world.

In the first reading from Exodus, the Israelites are attacked by the Amalekites at Rephidim. The very names here speak to us. Amalek — descended from Esau — has a name that in Hebrew may mean “plunderer” or “dweller in the valley,” and in Jewish tradition comes to symbolise the spirit that preys on the weary and the weak. Rephidim, by contrast, means “place of rest” or “support.” Yet it is precisely there, in a place named for rest, that Israel faces both thirst and assault. Scripture often teaches us this paradox: that the moments and places we expect to be restful can also become the testing ground of faith. Even in Rephidim, God provides — water from the rock and victory through the raised arms of Moses.

While Joshua leads the battle, Moses ascends a hill with the staff of God. As long as his hands are held up, Israel prevails; but whenever he lowers them, Amalek prevails. So Aaron and Hur support his hands, one on each side, and his hands remain steady until sunset. Moses then builds an altar and names it *The Lord is my banner (YHWH-nissi)*.

Amalek, as named in Genesis 36:12, becomes in Scripture a symbol of opportunistic violence — “how he attacked you on the way... when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you” (Deuteronomy 25:18). Today, this image demands careful handling. In the devastating conflict in Gaza, some invoke “Amalek” to demonise others and justify violence. But Christ teaches us to love our enemies, not name them Amalek. The Church must proclaim the Gospel of peace, not the language of conquest. As Pope Francis reminded the Muslim Council of Elders: “Peace is born of fraternity; it grows through the struggle against injustice and inequality; it is built by holding out a hand to others.” Our mission is to touch the suffering flesh of Christ in others — not with condemnation, but with compassion.

Moses’ raised arms are more than a military strategy. They reveal a deeper reality: that victory comes through dependence on God, through intercession, through community. And more still: his outstretched arms prefigure the Cross. There too, on a hill, a man bore the burden of others, arms outstretched not for one people, but for all. Moses’ staff symbolises God’s covenant presence; his position on the hill reveals God’s perspective. His companions, Aaron and Hur, remind us that we do not persevere alone.

This speaks directly to us in Zimbabwe today. Our own struggles are real: economic hardship, fractured families, children pushed into labour, marginalised communities unseen. Catholic Social Teaching calls us to solidarity — to raise not only our own arms, but one another’s. In prayer, in practical love, in presence. We are called to be the Aaron and Hur for our neighbour.

Psalm 121 gives voice to this hope: “I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” The Psalmist lifts his gaze not to escape, but to be anchored. He does not look to

the hills in panic, but in promise. The hills are not the threat — they are the place from which help will come.

This truth — that help comes when all seems lost — is captured movingly, we might recall, in a moment from *The Lord of the Rings*. After a long and brutal night of battle at Helm’s Deep, when the defenders are surrounded and all seems finished, they lift their eyes to the ridge at dawn. And there, at first light, the Riders of Rohan appear, galloping down the hill to turn the tide. That image — of rescue arriving just as darkness reaches its deepest point — echoes the Psalmist’s faith: that even when the night is long, and the struggle has worn us thin, God does not slumber. Help may come from beyond our line of sight — but never beyond God’s reach.

In our second reading, Paul urges his young companion: “Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed... Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.” Timothy, shaped by Scripture since childhood, is charged to preach with patience and clarity. The Christian life is not always convenient. But it is always grounded — in Scripture, in community, in Christ.

Just as Moses could not hold his arms up alone, and Timothy could not preach alone, neither do we labour alone. Our strength is sustained by God, by the Word, and by one another.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells of a widow who seeks justice from a judge “who neither feared God nor had respect for people.” Yet she keeps coming. “Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice,” says the judge. Jesus teaches us to pray always and not lose heart — and reminds us that if even a corrupt judge gives in, how much more will God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?

Here we see urgency, vulnerability, and justice woven together. The widow’s voice represents the unheard, the unseen, the unprotected. Her strength is in persistence — and her persistence is a form of faith: faith that God listens, faith

that justice matters, faith that silence is not the final word. This is not a lesson about nagging God, but about trusting him enough to speak, to return, to believe that justice is possible.

But why must we persist, if God already knows our need? It is not because God must be worn down, but because we must be opened up. Persistent prayer keeps us attuned — it oils the hidden gears of the soul, so that when grace floods in, we are supple enough to respond. Much of the spiritual life is learning to wait on God's time. Jesus says that God will grant justice "quickly" — and yet we know the long years we've waited: for healing, for reconciliation, for peace. But Scripture reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, and "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years" (Psalm 90:4). God is never late. What feels delayed is, in truth, grace arriving precisely on time. In the meantime, we are not abandoned. We are being prepared — hearts softened, patience stretched, souls widened — until we are ready to receive what God is ready to give.

A single image weaves these readings together: raised arms in hope. Moses' arms lifted in prayer; the Psalmist's eyes lifted to the hills; Timothy lifted by the Word; the widow lifting her voice. In all, we see the call to persevere in faith and in mission.

Today is also the 99th World Mission Sunday. Pope Leo XIV recently reminded the Pontifical Mission Societies — and us: "Our world, wounded by war, violence, and injustice, needs to hear the Gospel of God's love and to experience the reconciling power of Christ's grace." In Zimbabwe, this call is not abstract. It is for the student without fees, the grandmother raising orphans, the farmer without rain. It is for our Jesuit communities, educators, and companions — called to be missionaries of hope not through programmes alone, but through presence, prayer, and courage.

So let us enter into prayerful contemplation. Picture Moses, arms stretched, desert beneath him, Aaron and Hur by his side. Picture the Psalmist lifting his eyes to the hills. Picture the widow before the judge. Picture young Timothy, standing with Scripture in his heart, preparing to speak into a divided world.

What is God saying to you in these images?

As we come to the Eucharist, we bring our weary arms, our uncertain steps, our unspoken cries. And we ask the Lord who is our Banner to lift us again — to raise our hands, to send us out, to let hope take flesh among us.

And now as we conclude, let us consider these three questions in our prayer this morning:

- In what ways have I allowed my prayer and my hope to fall, like Moses's weary arms? What concrete practices might I take up this week to persevere in trust, in companionship with Christ?
- Who in my community or apostolic work needs me to be Aaron or Hur today? Where is the Spirit inviting me to uphold a brother's arms in the quiet solidarity of daily service?
- As a companion of Jesus, how am I being called to live out the mission of hope — not in theory, but in the real faces, names, and struggles of those entrusted to my care?

May the Lord, whose banner is lifted for us, sustain our arms, uphold our hearts, and send us forth in hope and in service. Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-10oct-19-yc-ot-29/>

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