

We learn independence from an early age. It's what allows us to take care of ourselves once our parents are no longer right there beside us. Along the way, we pick up things like planning, problem-solving, determination, and discipline. And because we value those qualities so highly, it's no surprise that we admire people who are "self-made," especially entrepreneurs who build great businesses or change the way we live with new technology. That's often the standard we use to define success. But is that really the whole picture of success?

But if that becomes our only, or even our primary, definition of success, we will end up chasing a shadow—something that can never satisfy the human heart. Our worth will rise and fall with what others think of us. We will always feel we've fallen short, always reaching for greater fame, always pursuing an illusion. And in the end, our hearts will remain empty. Jesus offers us something better: a truer way, a more human way, the only sure path to fulfillment in life.

The secret is found in two Greek words in today's readings.

St. Paul tells Timothy, "Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed" (2 Tim 3:14). The Greek word for faithful is μένω — "abide." It is the same word Jesus uses in John's Gospel: "Abide in me, as I abide in you" (Jn 15:4). To abide is not just to stay put, but to live in communion — to let the Word dwell in us, shaping our thoughts, desires, and actions. As John writes, "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you" (1 Jn 2:24). Paul is urging us to do the same. Not to chase novelties. Not to drift with the culture. Not to pour ourselves out in pursuit of success that fades. But to abide in Christ. Only

when we remain rooted in him can our lives bear fruit that lasts. Fruit that fills the heart, instead of leaving it empty.

The second word is actually a phrase that Luke uses in today's gospel. He tells us that Jesus taught his disciples "that they ought to pray always and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1). The Greek phrase for praying always (πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι) means to live in a state of continual prayer — an abiding fidelity of the heart. There is that word "abide" again. Prayer of this sort is not saying words nonstop, but orienting our whole life toward God, so that prayer becomes the very atmosphere we breathe.

A common misstep for many of us is the feeling of unworthiness. We convince ourselves that we must pray perfectly — at least as we define perfection — as though prayer were another measure of success to be achieved. But that is just another illusion, another chase after the world's definition of accomplishment. We hear "never lose heart" and imagine it means never doubting, never struggling, never failing. That is not what St. Paul or St. Luke are teaching. To "not lose heart" means something deeper: it means resting our heart in the heart of Jesus, especially Jesus on the Cross.

This was the insight of Proba, a devout Roman widow, who once asked St. Augustine how to pray. His answer has guided Christians for centuries. Augustine wrote: "God does not want to know what we want ... but wants us rather to exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us. His gift is very great indeed, but our capacity is too small ... That is why we are told: Enlarge your desires." Prayer, in other words, stretches the heart so that it can hold more of God.

And isn't that the opposite of how the world teaches us to measure success? The world says success is filling our lives with accomplishments, wealth, or recognition. Augustine reminds us that real success is not how much we can accumulate, but how much we can receive. Success is not a full résumé, but an enlarged heart — a heart stretched wide open to God.

The widow in today's Gospel embodies this truth. She has nothing: no wealth, no power, no influence. Her only weapon is perseverance. She becomes the model of discipleship because she is helpless yet persistent — and this is always our condition before God. We bring him not our trophies, not our self-made empires, but our brokenness, our emptiness, our nothingness. And precisely there, in humility, our hearts are open to receive.

Luke's Gospel shows us Jesus himself living this truth. Again and again, he is found in prayer: at his baptism, on the mountain, in the garden, and finally on the cross. He not only taught his disciples what to pray but how to pray — with perseverance, with humility, with trust. Prayer is not about comparing ourselves with others or presenting God with a list of achievements. It is about childlike faith, forgiveness, and surrender. St. Thérèse of Lisieux puts it beautifully: "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart, a simple look toward heaven, a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy" (CCC no. 2558).

The First Reading reinforces this. Moses, with his arms lifted high, sustains Israel in battle. When he weakens, Aaron and Hur support him. The Fathers of the Church saw in this a sign of

Christ on the Cross — arms outstretched until the victory is won. True victory does not come from the strength of the warrior, but from the perseverance of prayer, from identifying ourselves with Jesus stretched out in love. Our prayer, too, must be cruciform: persevering, trusting, rooted in the Cross.

And here we see what real success looks like. Not the world's version, with its fleeting applause and fragile trophies. True success is to abide in Christ. True success is to persevere in prayer, especially in our weakness. True success is letting our hearts rest in Jesus, crucified and risen, who alone can fill them.

The victories of this world will pass away. But those who abide in Christ, who pray without ceasing, who open their hearts in humility, will share in his triumph. As St. Paul reminds us: “If we die with him, we will also live with him” (2 Tim 2:11).