

October 16, 2022
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.

He said, "There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, 'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.' For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, 'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me. I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.'

The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Background:

In the gospel for last week, ten lepers were healed and restored to their place in the community. The Samaritan among the ten also received reassurance from Jesus that he was among the saved. Following this text in Luke's gospel, a Pharisee asks Jesus when the Kingdom of God will come. Jesus responds that the Kingdom of God is not like the physical world where something exists here but not there. Rather, the Kingdom is everywhere! This leads Jesus into an extended instruction about his presence among them as the Son of Man. Following that teaching Jesus tells two parables that focus on prayer. The first is this Sunday's gospel; the second is the gospel for next Sunday.

At the time of Jesus, widows were people without status in society. When a husband died, often the widow returned to the house of her father or brother. Women had no independent standing in the community. They were not permitted to enter legal disputes for themselves. Because they could so easily be exploited, they were given special consideration throughout the Jewish tradition. This tradition continued in the Christian community and is reflected in the parable Jesus tells in today's gospel.

A comment about the legal system may also be helpful. Decisions were not based so much on the "evidence" presented. Rather decisions were based on the number witnesses and their status within the community that would support one side or the other of disagreement. A judge needed to be a man whose decision could be trusted and agreeable to both parties, lest people begin to take matters into their own hands. A judge needed to have a certain personal integrity and be respected throughout the community, and be above being easily influenced for personal gain.

The parable does not include information about the nature of the case. As Jesus unfolds the parable, the woman is presumed to be in a particularly difficult place. We presume that if she had a brother or a married son, that person would take up her cause. Here she has been forced to break with accepted norms of behavior and seek justice from the judge herself. Social norms of the day would require that women and men not speak directly to each other. But there was also a strong religious tradition that one attended to the needs of widows. Jesus describes the judge as not fearing God or respecting any human person. Jesus is telling us that this judge rejects the two pillars on which all religious life is based, love of God and love of neighbor. Nonetheless he gives in to this very vulnerable woman. The woman, by her persistence, has prevailed over a strong, powerful judge, and over the social norms of the day. Goodness and compassion have overcome evil and self-importance. The realm of God breaks through even in the most unlikely circumstances.

The question is: can the disciples of Jesus remain faithful and persevere in the most dark and difficult of situations? "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8)

Reflection questions:

1. Who are the people without voice or power in your community? Who advocates for them?
2. Are there also people within your community who have overcome significant obstacles in their lives? Are any of these also part of those you would name as powerless?
3. Can you think of other occasions in the gospels when widows are central to Jesus' ministry or preaching?
4. Does Jesus' own experience of persistence in prayer speak to you?
5. This widow is being used by Jesus as an example of one who is persistent in prayer. Does it have meaning for you that Jesus is using a woman, a widow, as an example of how one should pray?
6. Are there things that you have stopped praying for? Why did you stop?
7. Have there been times in your life when you wondered if God was being attentive to you, or your prayer, or your needs?
8. If the Son of Man comes looking to find faith on earth, where would you point him?
9. Can you take some time to talk with God about whatever struck you the most in this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclalledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for October 20, 2019, the Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amalek came and waged war against Israel. Moses, therefore, said to Joshua, "Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." Joshua engaged Amalek in battle after Moses had climbed the hill with Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. Moses' hands grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands until sunset. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

*Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
I lift up my eyes toward the mountains; whence shall help come to me?
indeed he neither slumbers nor sleeps, the guardian of Israel.
The Lord is your guardian and your shade; he is beside you at your right hand.
The sun shall not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will guard you from all evil; he will guard your life.
The Lord will guard your coming and your going, both now and forever.*

Beloved: Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it. From infancy you have known the Scriptures, which give you wisdom for salvation. Scripture is inspired by God, useful for teaching, refutation, correction, and training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, and encourage through all patience and teaching.

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity to pray always without becoming weary. He said, "There was a judge who neither feared God nor respected any human being. A widow in that town used to say to him, 'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.' For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, 'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.'" The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Excerpts from Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 121:1-8; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2, and Luke 18:1-8

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for October 16th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Luke, Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the need to pray always, without letting up. A judge was for a long time unwilling to render a just decision for a widow. But eventually he got tired

of her bothering him, and he provided a decision for her case. Jesus asked the disciples, "Will not God secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night?"

The other readings also have references to getting help from God, and being persistent in asking for it. In the first reading from Exodus, when Joshua engaged Amalek in battle, as long as Moses kept his hands raised, Israel had the better of the fight. Aaron and Hur supported Moses' hands so they remained steady until sunset, and Joshua defeated Amalek. Psalm 101 proclaims, "From whence shall come my help? My help is from the Lord; the guardian never slumbers. The Lord who is beside you will guard you from all evil; he will guard your coming and your going, now and forever." In the second reading, from the second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, "Remain faithful to what you have learned; from infancy you have known the Scriptures, which give you wisdom for salvation. Proclaim the word. Be persistent; convince and encourage, through all patience and teaching."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!