

October 20, 2019
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 text for last week, ten lepers were healed and restored to their place in the community. A Samaritan was among them, and when he returned to give Jesus thanks, he also received reassurance that he was among those 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. Jesus tells him that the Kingdom of God is right there among them. Then Jesus addresses his disciples, preparing them for a time when they will long to see the Son of Man. His instruction leads them to ask about where these things will take place. Jesus does not answer their questions, but instead tells a parable about the need to be persistent in their prayer, which is the gospel text for this Sunday.

Jesus told two kind of parables. Many drew from people's everyday experience, with a surprise ending. Another type of parable featured some unlikely character or situation that was meant to make one particular point. The parable of the unjust servant that was the gospel two weeks ago is one such parable. Today's gospel is another. The Judge, who is really the main character in the parable as Jesus would have told it, is not being held up to be emulated, but to be in stark contrast to God, who might seem to be too slow to respond to our petitions.

Widows at the time of Jesus were not allowed to speak for themselves because they had no legal status. When their husband died, they had no claim on the property. They were dependent on the men in their families to speak on their behalf. Without a father or married son, they were easy targets for those who would take advantage of the vulnerable. Therefore, the moral code of the day developed a special consideration for widows, along with other vulnerable segments of the society.

Disputes in which a judge or magistrate might be involved are public events. Everyone knows the arguments and the decision that is rendered. The decision is not so much based on "evidence" but on the standing in the community of those offering testimony for one party and the other. The task of the judge is to find a solution that will be accepted by both parties, and not draw them into more serious conflict. Therefore, he needs to be a man whose decision can be trusted by both parties, lest people begin to take matters into their own hands. The judge would have to have a certain personal integrity, and at the same time be respected throughout the community.

Jesus does not include the reason for the dispute in this parable, and it is not of importance to the point that he is making. It seems that the widow does not have a male relative, brother, or married son to take up her cause. Therefore, she has been forced to break with socially accepted behavior and seek justice from the judge herself. Social norms of the day would require that he not speak with her. But there is a strong religious tradition that

demands that everyone attend to the needs of widows. The judge is described by Jesus as not fearing God, nor respecting the human person. Jesus is telling his listeners that this judge rejects the two pillars on which all religious life is based, love of God and love of neighbor. Nonetheless, this scoundrel of a judge gives in to this very vulnerable helpless woman. That is precisely the point of the parable. This woman by her persistence has prevailed over a strong powerful godless judge. Goodness and compassion have overcome evil and self importance. The realm of God breaks through even in the most unlikely circumstances. Therefore, the Christian must continue and persist in their prayer, knowing that God will respond in the fullness of God's time.

But the question that Jesus asks at the end is, will those who believe be strong enough to persevere in faith and hope until the time that God has determined.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the people without voice in your community?
2. When Jesus describes the judge as one who does not fear God or other people, who are some of the people you know of who come to mind?
3. The thought of these two agents coming together in a conflict raises what kind of thoughts and feelings within you?
4. Have you ever felt like God had turned a deaf ear to your prayer?
5. What accomplishments have you had to work toward for a long time, and overcame some significant difficulties to achieve them?
6. Have there also been times when God seemed to break through in way that surprised you?
7. If the Son of Man comes looking to find faith on earth, where would you point him?
8. Can you take some time now to talk honestly about whatever thoughts and feelings arose within you from 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://fsc-alledtobe.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.

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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