

29th Sunday OT – Luke 18:1-8

Widow and the Judge

In recent weeks, Luke has been expanding his portrait of a disciple of Jesus. A disciple asks for an *increase in faith*, does what is required as an *unprofitable servant*, *show gratitude* for gifts received by giving God glory. We learn today how a disciple also needs to **pray continually** and **never lose heart**. At the beginning of the journey to Jerusalem, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. The parables of this week and next furnish us with a commentary on the prayer he then gave them.

Today's parable is about a widow. Instead of being a person exploited and without resources, as widows are usually portrayed in scripture, she was active, enterprising, and persistent. She won her cause by allowing the judge, who had power to help her, no peace. This judge fell far short of the ideal of the judge in Israel; he neither feared God nor respected man. He only gave way and did his duty to save himself further battering from the widow. The word he uses is taken from boxing: he did not want a black eye!

The Christian is to pray, "Your kingdom come." This prayer is not made to an unjust judge nor to a friend in bed at midnight, but **to a loving and watchful Father**. The prayer is for the vindication of all those in this world who suffer injustice like the widow in the parable. It is a continuation of the kingdom ministry of Jesus announced in Nazareth. Such prayer is to be accompanied by action such as the widow took. God will surely vindicate his faithful if they pray to him day and night like the widow. Meanwhile, prayer for an increase of faith must continue. Faith is what the Son of Man will be looking for when he returns to this world.

A while ago, I had asked several parishioners to write me their commentary on the readings for the coming Sunday so that I might get a better perspective from the pew. And some did.

Here is one that I used today for the first reading from Exodus where the two men hold up Moses' arms. "A married person and parent can get tired cooking meals for people who don't always appreciate my work, cleaning up a home that isn't self-cleaning, driving kids to sports, reminding kids to do their jobs – for the third time." (I have to admit, it sounds like our community of brothers, once in a while). And she continues, "We can ask for that support or we can be observant and look for ways to support those in need."

(I like this next one from the same person for the gospel.) “The widow didn’t give up and neither should we. Take a deep breath, perhaps treat yourself with a piece of chocolate, and then go ahead and write that letter, sign that petition, go to that meeting at the parish council, and keep persisting in your message of justice.” (I took her advice but had two pieces of chocolate.)

The last part was my favorite, though, and the person writes, “I may be busy this morning getting the kids ready for school or myself ready to go to work. I may be tempted to tell myself that I’ll pray later, just like I tell myself I’ll exercise later. Well, later tends to slip, slide away till it’s bedtime. Perhaps bring the acts of getting the kids or myself ready to a prayerful consciousness. It may not mean sitting down and meditating, but rather bringing an awareness of my dressing, eating, driving – as these also are sacred acts, and doing them with intention.”

The reason this last reflection on the readings caught my attention is that this is what Zen Buddhism is about, at least the Zen Buddhism that I learned in Japan. “Bringing prayerful attention and awareness of my dressing, eating, driving,” also caught the attention of Thomas Merton, the famous author and monk of the Cistercian Strict Order outside Bardstown, Kentucky. The Japanese Tea Ceremony is simply making oneself and your guests aware of an everyday activity by simply doing it without rush and with conscious attention as though it was the most important act that can be done in the moment. Nothing else matters, only the guests and making them tea. It has become a ritual in Japan! The same is for the Japanese art of flower arranging and other activities. There is no rush, keep it simple, focus on the present as though in the moment the act was the most important thing to be done.

Zen Buddhism simply emphasizes the present moment. Thomas Merton saw the connection between the present moment and the presence of God. “I am who am.” Our God is a God *in the moment*, in the now, so that the present is what matters. Prayer is being with God in the moment, and not necessarily reciting words that someone else wrote. The past is finished, never to be repeated, and can be an escape from the present, especially in prayer. The future can be a substitute for daydreaming, an excuse for not being focused on the present, an escape from the present when we should be present to God and nothing else should matter.

So the next time when you don’t have any time to pray, then focus on washing the dishes as though it was the most important thing to do for God, and in his presence.