

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Heb 4:12

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

The word of God is living and effective,
discerning reflections and thoughts of the heart.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 18:1-8; L147C

Jesus told his disciples a parable
about the necessity for them
to pray always without be-
coming weary.

He said, "There was a judge in a
certain town

who neither feared God nor re-
spected 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.

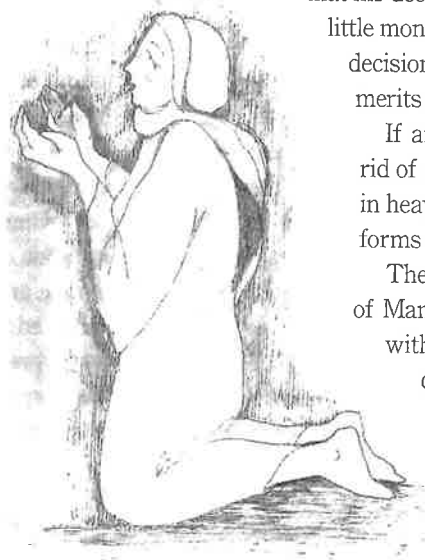
Will not God then secure the rights of his
chosen ones

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?"



Reflecting on the Gospel

"Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" Persistent questioning bordering on bothering behavior is something with which we are all too familiar. Children have a knack for this, especially at an inquisitive age. But office drama can bring it out too, as well as adult family relationships. This is something Jesus was familiar with as well, as today's parable demonstrates.

In the parable, the judge is named "unjust." He is willing to (and likely has) perverted justice in cases before him, which is a clear violation of Mosaic Law. The point of naming him as an unjust judge is to make clear that his decision is for sale, whether to the widow (who likely has little money) or to her adversary. The judge is willing to make a decision in her favor simply to get rid of her, regardless of the merits of the case.

If an unjust judge is willing to do what is right simply to get rid of a persistent nag, how much more will a loving Father in heaven do what is right? This simple but profound insight forms the core of the message today.

Then, the gospel ends on a puzzling note, "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" The story opens with the necessity to pray always, but concludes with a question about faith. It's as though the song started in a major key but ends on a minor. This is no mere "throwaway" line, but is something significant and even vital to interpreting the parable.

Luke writes at a time when Jesus' expected return has been delayed, thus the injunction "to pray always without becoming weary."

Perhaps Luke himself is aware of some in his own generation

who have given up on this expected return of Jesus, and gone back to a former way of life. This might be the reason, too, for the explanation of the parable on Jesus' lips: "Will he be slow to answer them? / I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily." The ceaseless praying is about justice, not necessarily Christ's return. And then the story ends on a wistful note, wondering whether, when the Son of Man ultimately does return, he will find faith. Or will it be that the disciples have effectively abandoned the injunction to pray always and thereby lost their faith? This question, pertinent as it was nearly two thousand years ago, is applicable still.

Living the Paschal Mystery

It can be so difficult to be patient. Lessons we learned or attempted to learn in childhood are still with us as adults. Opportunities to learn patience abound! One clever prayer, inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, reads: "Lord, grant me patience . . . NOW!"

Early Christians, and maybe even modern, grew impatient with the delayed Parousia, the promised coming of Christ. Some Christians eventually abandoned this hope and therefore abandoned their discipleship. Luke's gospel is a reminder that disciples are "to pray always." And not only that, but to do so "without becoming weary." That may seem like a tall order, equivalent to telling a child on a long drive to "sit patiently; we'll be there soon enough." Yet, that's the exhortation we receive, along with a final question wondering whether the Son of Man will find faith when he returns. This, too, in a nod to the children

in the car, might be the equivalent of, “I wonder if there will be ice cream for children who were quiet the entire way?” The issues that concerned the early church concern us. When will Jesus return? How long will this be? Is he slow to answer? The response is that we continue praying, doing justice, and God will act when he does.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Jesus told his disciples a parable / about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.

To the point: What does it mean to pray and particularly to “pray always”? The widow in today’s gospel continues to bring her petition to the judge, even when she has no reason to believe he will hear and answer her. Jesus presupposes that this relationship in prayer will require effort and persistence when he warns the disciples against “becoming weary.” As in all relationships, sometimes communication is easy and at other times it might seem nearly impossible. In our relationship with God we are called to persevere even when it seems like our prayers are not being heard, much less answered. Unlike the widow, our Judge cares for us deeply and constantly works for our good.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In the book of Exodus Moses stands on the top of a hill with hands raised as Joshua engages the Amalekites in battle below. Throughout the day, as his arms grow weak, he is supported by Aaron and Hur. At this time in the story of the Exodus, the people have been delivered from slavery in Egypt into the freedom and desolation of the desert. Here they face new challenges. Where will they find water? What about food? In each instance God provides, first sweetening the bitter water at Marah and then providing quail and manna for the people every morning. Now the people face a new threat from the attacking Amalekites and once again they are assured that God is with them. Each answer to prayer builds up the relationship between God and God’s people.

to experience: We no longer subscribe to the belief that God gives us power to vanquish our enemies in battle. Prayer is not a tool that we use to bend God’s will to our own. Rather it is the other way around. Through prayer, we are changed, and change is often painful and tiring. Prayer demands spiritual perseverance. As Moses requires the support of Aaron and Hur to keep his hands upright, we also need the support of our community of faith to carry us in prayer when our strength is depleted.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: There is only one reason to bring our needs, desires, and cares to the Lord in prayer: we believe in God’s goodness and mercy. Indeed, the one we cry out to in prayer “neither slumbers nor sleeps,” but “guard[s] [our] coming and [our] going, / both now and forever.” From our ancestors in faith like Moses, Aaron, Hur, the disciples, St. Paul, and Timothy, we can learn to walk in the way of prayerful trust.

to psalmist preparation: Today’s psalm is indeed good news. Our God is faithful. His protective love surrounds us at all times. How does this knowledge of God’s care for you affect your daily life? What areas of struggle is God calling you to place in his hands?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Aaron and Hur hold up Moses’ arms as he prays for Joshua. Who supports your prayer life?

How do you understand the line from today’s psalm, “The LORD will guard your coming and your going”?

In today’s second reading St. Paul urges Timothy to “be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient.” Where is God calling you to persistence right now in your spiritual life?

The gospel writer tells us the moral being illustrated in today’s parable: we are to “pray always without becoming weary.” How do you follow Jesus’ command to pray always?