

Synopsis: OT XXIX [C] Sunday (Oct 16) Homily Lk 18:1-8 (L-16)

Introduction: Today's readings are mainly about prayer -- perseverance in prayer, constancy in prayer and trust in God as we pray. They are also about the Trustworthiness and Justice of God, the type of Justice that reaches out to the poor and the weak, enabling them to fight against injustice.

Scripture lessons:In the first reading, Moses, after sending Joshua to fight against Amalek, is presented as making tireless intercession with constancy for the victory of Israel's army. Both Moses and the widow in today's Gospel story teach us how we should pray with trusting Faith and perseverance. In the second reading, St. Paul instructs Timothy to persevere in his ministry, to proclaim the word of God with persistence in all circumstances and to use it to "*correct, reprove and appeal with patience.*"

By introducing the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow in today's Gospel, Jesus emphasizes the "*necessity of praying always and not losing heart.*" Constancy in prayer is Faith in action. Jesus presents the widow in today's Gospel as a model of the trust and tenacity with which his disciples are to pray. The widow was asking for something which God would certainly want for her - justice.

Life messages:1) We need to combine formal prayers with action prayer: It is ideal that we start our prayers by reading from the Bible, especially the Psalms and the Gospels. Formal, memorized and liturgical prayers are also essential for the Christian prayer life. Personal prayer is of great importance in our life of prayer. Talking to God in our own words -- praising Him, thanking Him and presenting our needs before Him -- transforms our whole life into prayer. We should perfect our prayers by bringing ourselves into God's presence during our work several times during the day and by offering all that we are, that we have and that we do to God. Along with formal and memorized prayers, this type of prayer life enables us to pray always and pray with constancy and trusting perseverance.

2) We should not expect to get whatever we pray for. This parable does not suggest that God writes a blank check, guaranteeing whatever we want whenever we want it in the form we ask for. But we conveniently forget the fact that, often, a loving father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks would hurt rather than help him (e.g., a knife). God is like that. He knows what to give, when to give and how to give it. Only God sees time whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus

said that we must never be discouraged in prayer. Instead, we have to leave the answer to God's decision saying, "Thy will be done." Sincere and persistent prayer makes us ready to accept His will.

OT XXIX [C] (October 16) Ex 17:8-13, [II Tm 3:14--4:2](#), Lk 18:1-8

Anecdote# 1: Gideon's experiment with prayer: Many years ago a man named Dalton suggested that the prayer of petition should be put to the test. One-half of England, he said, should pray for rain and then compare the rainfall with the other half who did not pray for rain. He was not, in fact, the first believer with a flair for experimentation. In the Book of Judges, Gideon said to God, "If you really mean to deliver Israel by my hand, as you have declared, see now, I spread out a fleece. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is left dry, then I shall know." Gideon had the mind of a true experimenter. The following night he reversed his experiment to test God a second time. He prayed, "Do not be angry with me if I speak once again.... Let the fleece alone be dry, and let there be dew on the ground all around it" (Jgs 6:36-40). Prayer isn't just a way of getting what we want, but some people go to the opposite extreme of never asking God for anything (while having no problem with the prayer of praise, thanks, and so on). If it makes sense to thank God for something, it must make sense to ask God for it and to persevere in that prayer as Jesus proposes in today's Gospel (*Bible Diary* 2004).

2: **Never give up!** Years ago there was a young man in Illinois with only six months of formal school education. His mother home-schooled him and taught him to have a dream and to keep trying to realize that dream, relying on the power of persistent prayer. First he ran for an office in the legislature and was beaten. Next, he entered business but failed at that, too, and spent the next 17 years paying the debts of his worthless partner. He fell in love with a charming young lady and they became engaged. But she died which led the young man to a short-term nervous breakdown. Next, he ran for Congress and was defeated. He then tried to obtain an appointment to the U.S. Land Office, but didn't succeed. With strong belief in the power of prayer, he ran for U. S. Vice-Presidency and lost. Two years later he was defeated again for the office of Senator. He ran for office once more and was elected the 16th President of the United States, thus realizing his dream by the power of persistent prayer. He was Abraham Lincoln. It took Winston Churchill three years to get through the eighth grade, because he couldn't pass English – of all things! Ironically, he was asked many years later to give the commencement address at Oxford University. His now famous speech consisted of only three words: "Never give up!" And that is the message of today's Gospel parable of the poor widow and the corrupt judge. (*Harold Buetow in God Still Speaks! Listen*).

3:The persistent widow in our midst:It may be a spouse's Parkinson's disease, a parent's Alzheimer's, a sister's breast cancer, a child's leukemia. The illness of a loved one, a catastrophe striking their family, the suffering of someone dear to them transforms these moms and dads and sons and daughters and friends into dedicated advocates and determined guardians. They fight hospitals and insurance companies for the critical medical care needed by their loved one. They take on the most obstinate bureaucracies for the assistance and services their child is entitled to but denied. They work tirelessly to raise awareness, raise money, and, when necessary, raise Cain, so that their loved one may live as fully a life as possible, so that a cure might be found, so that other families will not have to experience the pain and anguish they have known. These dedicated men and women are the Gospel widow in our midst. They face down the "dishonest judges" of arrogance and avarice; they take on the "fearful judges" of insensitivity and unawareness; they go toe-to-toe with the "judges who fear neither God nor respect any human being," save themselves. Their love for the sick and suffering enables them to carry on "day and night;" their faith and conviction in the rightness of their cause empowers them to carry on despite the frustration and inaction they face. The very compassion of God is their hope and assurance that their prayer will be heard. (*Connections*).

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First reading: Exodus 18: 8-13: Clearly, Moses and Aaron understood the "*necessity of praying always and not losing heart,*" when Joshua was fighting the battle against the Amalekites. At that time, Israel's resources were inadequate, and their morale was at a low ebb. The Amalekites were a group of people who

stood between Israel and the land God had promised her. They had waged war on Israel, and Israel had no choice but to fight back. Staff in hand, Moses stood on top of the mountain overlooking the battleground. He was praying fervently for Israel with raised, outstretched arms. As he grew weary, his two aides, Aaron and Hur, seated him on a rock and propped up his arms. *“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.”* When we join the army with Jesus, who prayed for us with outstretched arms on the cross, we will surely win the battle with our own Amalekites: the temptations and evil tendencies in our lives.

Second reading: II Timothy 3:14-4:2: Paul recommends to Timothy—and to all of us -- perseverance in prayer, in the practice of the Faith and in preaching the word of God. At the time Paul was writing, pressure groups were trying to force Timothy to water down his doctrines of Faith. Therefore, Paul advised Timothy to *“preach the word, stay with the task, whether convenient or inconvenient, correcting, reproving, appealing, constantly teaching and never losing patience.”* *“Whether the time is favorable or unfavorable,”* Paul continued, *“proclaim the message”* and *“carry out your ministry fully.”* Our own ministry is to worship the Lord, share the Gospel with others and bear witness to Christ by growing in discipleship and serving our neighbors lovingly, as Jesus did. Paul then reminded Timothy that the Holy Scriptures were meant to help him in these duties: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work”* (II Tim 3: 16-17).

Exegesis:The context:When Luke wrote this Gospel, the *Parousia* or Second Coming of Jesus had been delayed beyond what the early Church had expected. In addition, the Church was experiencing persecution from both the Jews and the Romans. The persecuted early Christians were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their Faith. Hence, today’s Gospel lesson addresses the issues of Faith in difficult times. It reassures the disciples that God is listening to their persistent prayers and will grant them justice and vindicate their Faith in the end. The Gospel today seems to be a classic example of the link between perseverance and blessing. Luke sets the story in the context of a challenge Jesus makes to his disciples to pray always and not lose heart, that is, to persevere in prayer and receive God’s blessings.

The historical background: This parable is based on the corrupt Roman legal practices prevalent in Palestine at the time of Jesus. We know that the judge in the

parable was not a Jewish judge, because ordinary Jewish disputes were judged before the Jewish elders. In Dt 1:16-17, Moses charged the judges to render fair and honest decisions regardless of the wealth or social standing of the petitioner. Hence, we conclude that the judge in the parable was one of the paid magistrates appointed either by Herod or by the Romans. Since such judges were avaricious, corrupt and without fear of God or the public, people called them “*Dayyaneh Gezeloth*”, robber judges. Although the Hebrew Scriptures demand protection for widows, orphans, and aliens (Dt 10:18-19, 24:17-21, Ex 22:22-24), the widows were not included in Hebrew laws on inheritance, and they became common symbols of the exploited and the oppressed. Prophets like Isaiah (1:23; 10:2), and Malachi (3:5), criticized the harsh treatment widows received, and throughout the Bible, widows are viewed as being under the special protection of God (Jer 49:11; Ps 68:5; Jas 1:27). The widow in Jesus’ parable was the symbol of all who were poor, defenseless, and without hope of ever obtaining justice. Her opponent was probably rich, crooked and influential.

Persistence of the widow: But the widow in Jesus’ parable had one powerful weapon—a dogged persistence which gave the judge no peace. Her persistence was a very public event, and the entire community witnessed the widow’s repeated encounters with the judge. By publicly badgering the judge every day, the woman was trying to shame this shameless person. Finally, the unjust judge was forced to yield. Hence, this parable is not only about the efficacy of persistent prayer, but also about the character of God, His Trustworthiness and Justice, a type of Justice that reaches out to the poor and the weak, enabling them to fight against injustice. God’s Justice goes far beyond human limits and can bring fullness of life to the poorest and the most vulnerable people in our world. Jesus ends the parable with a question: Will his followers continue to have confidence in God’s Justice until He comes again in Final Judgment?

God is not being likened to, but contrasted with, an unjust judge. God is not compared to the unjust and insensitive judge, needing to be bribed or forced by our persistent prayers to give us what we need. Jesus is contrasting God to him. Jesus is asking us to persevere in prayer that opens our hearts and minds to God’s always available grace. Prayer does not seek to move God’s heart for what we want. Prayer is the opening up of our own heart and spirit to what God wants for us. God hears the cry of the people and God answers that cry speedily, although that does not seem to fit with our actual experience of unanswered prayers, even in our dire needs. How, then, does He answer? It is by His active presence in our lives. The truth is that God is intimately present in all the turmoil and terror of life, vindicating those who cry out in Faith. God is, in fact, with us, even before the cry

for help leaves our mouth. God is present, experiencing our pain and distress, and Jesus is the guarantee. In his ministry, Jesus shared this immediacy of God's love for the deaf, blind, diseased, mentally-ill, poor, weak, despised, alone and the crippled, as well as the dead and those who mourned them. His response to the cries of people was speedy. But Jesus himself seemed to be God-forsaken on the cross. God was in Jesus, bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows. The same God is with us, savouring the joy of our laughter and feeling the agony of pain and grief, as our Immanuel: God-with-us.

Faith is the condition of God's vindication of us: Luke seems to be the first author of the Christian Scriptures who concludes that he and everyone in his community will die a natural death before Jesus returns in the Parousia or "*second coming*." (Lk 18:1-8). That's why, throughout his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, he emphasizes persistence in Faith. In other words, God will take care of His obligations, and our job is to take care of our obligations. God will vindicate us, His persecuted community, provided we stay watchful and persevere in Faith and prayer. We have to trust God to bring about that which He has promised. In praying, we show our confidence that our God hears, and cares, and acts. When we pray for something as essential as "daily bread," we are making a rather amazing statement of Faith in the Goodness of a loving and providing God. Jesus calls us, with the example of the widow and the unjust judge, to have Faith, to trust that God in his Goodness will bring about the Justice we all seek, the blessing we all require. But we should continue in prayer for these things until they happen, as an expression of our trusting Faith and dependence on God. Thus, the purpose of all our prayers is the augmentation of our trusting Faith in a loving and caring God who is our Father.

Life messages:1) We need to combine formal prayers with action prayer: It is ideal that we start our prayers by reading from the Bible, especially the Psalms and the Gospels. Formal, memorized and liturgical prayers are also essential for the Christian prayer life. Personal prayer is of great importance in our life of prayer. Talking to God in our own words -- praising Him, thanking Him and presenting our needs before Him -- transforms our whole life into prayer. We should perfect our prayers by bringing ourselves into God's presence during our work several times during the day and by offering all that we are, that we have and that we do to God. This will help us to bring all our successes and failures, joys and sorrows, highs and lows to God in prayer. Along with formal and memorized prayers, this type of prayer life enables us to pray always and pray with constancy and trusting perseverance.

2) We should not expect to get whatever we pray for. This parable does not suggest that God writes a blank check, guaranteeing whatever we want whenever we want it in the form we ask for. But we conveniently forget the fact that, often, a loving father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks would hurt rather than help him (e.g., a knife). God is like that. He knows what to give, when to give and how to give it. Only God sees time whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus said that we must never be discouraged in prayer. Instead we have to leave the answer to God's decision saying, as he did in Gethsemane, "Thy will be done."

3) To make our prayers effective, we do not have to nag God. Long, meaningless prayers -- although a natural expression of our misery -- should not be used as bargaining chips with God. The parable teaches that our prayers do not change God's will. Instead, they bring our minds into line with His purposes. Persistent prayer -- continuing communion with God -- reshapes our hearts to God's original design. Such prayer does not change God; instead, it changes us. Sincere and persistent prayer makes us ready to accept His will. In *Priests for the Third Millennium*, Monsignor Timothy Dolan observes that prayer must become like eating and breathing. We have to eat daily, not stock up on food on Monday, and then take off the rest of the week. Do we take ten deep breaths and say, "Good, that's over for a while, I won't have to breathe for a couple of hour."

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