

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, “Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone; yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.””

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to His chosen ones who cry to Him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, He will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection Questions

Luke 18:1-8

1) **The Context:** This week's gospel is strongly linked to the passages that precede it (Luke 17:20-37) and succeed it (Lk 18:9-14; 19:11-27). Also closely connected to this passage is Luke 11:5-13- (parable about persevering in prayer). The Church that Luke is writing for/to is a Church undergoing intense persecution and many people are simply awaiting the Second Coming of Christ where Jesus will come back and relieve them of their suffering. But, for some, the wait has been too long and they are getting discouraged. Chp. 17:20-37 describes the events that surround the Second Coming so that the disciples can be prepared. The gospel passage this week (Chp. 18) addresses how the disciples of Christ are to enact their faith when times get difficult. Jesus tries to reassure them that God hears every prayer (even though it may seem that He is not listening because of a delayed response). The passage offers consolation to those being persecuted, reminding them that the Lord will 'quickly grant justice'. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector follows this passage reminding the reader once again of God's Merciful response to the deep heartfelt prayer.

2) There are four basic lessons offered in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge; 1) our duty to persist in prayer, 2) that persistent/ heart-felt prayer will always receive an answer, 3) in the end God will always champion the just cause of His elect over their adversaries, 4) warns the disciple not to lose faith in a time of 'seeming' abandonment by God. (1 Thess. 5:17). When have we been offered these (or similar lessons) by God on our journey of faith with Him? When have we been tempted to 'lose our faith' when it seemed that God was abandoning us?

3) Verse 1 tells us the purpose of the parable (a rare occurrence in parables). Jesus speaks to His disciples and tries to reemphasize how important it is for them to pray and not lose heart. This is an interesting juxtaposition of concepts. Jesus knows that the disciple will have to face many challenging circumstances in his/her life, but at the same time Jesus begs them not to lose heart. How is a disciple prevented from losing heart?- PRAYER. When has your prayer life saved you from losing heart when life gets difficult? What kinds of prayer have helped you in the past? (e.g. adoration, participating in the sacraments of Eucharist and reconciliation, vocal prayer, singing, glorifying God in His Creation, rosary, meditation, praying with others?) How can we make more time for prayer in our lives?

4) This passage is very similar to Sirach 35:15-25 where God is the just judge who champions the cause of the orphan and the widow. The main characters in this parable could not be further apart on the social spectrum. The judge represents the epitome of power (e.g. does not have a jury, his decisions are final), while the widow represents the epitome of powerlessness (no other male in her family to stand up for her, no inheritance of her husband's estate). The judge is described as having no fear of God nor respect for people (completely ignoring the two most important commandments...to love God above all else, and to love ones' neighbor as oneself). The Fear of God as an Old Testament Biblical concept is a healthy disposition of reverential respect that any truly humble religious person should have. The Love of neighbor flows forth from this holy reverence for God. Basically the parable is telling the hearer that we should not expect any kind of justice or compassion from this judge.

5) The widow symbolizes complete vulnerability (economic, physical, social/relational). She is completely dependent upon her God and the compassion of the Jewish community that surrounds her for her basic needs and well-being. The scriptures remind the Jewish people of the kind of protection and provision they are to provide for these very vulnerable ones (Deut. 10:18-19, 24:17-21). The Scripture also speaks plainly about God's response to those who fail to offer these vulnerable ones protection and provision (Deut. 27:19, Exodus 22:22-24, Luke 20:47). In addition, the scripture speaks of the fact that the people of the Jewish society should offer a special place to these widows because of their complete dependence upon God. (Acts 6:1-6, 1 Timothy 5:3-5). God clearly has expectations of how His community treats the most vulnerable among them. In what ways does Christ continue to expect His Church and all His followers to make the care and the protection of the most vulnerable in midst of the Church and in the world a priority? How do we see this enacted? (when have we seen it fail?)

6) This passage tells us that the widow continued to demand justice (during the entire time that the judge resisted granting her justice). Jesus commends the woman for her persistence, (even if her persistence is completely annoying to the one from whom she seeks justice). The scripture clearly has shown us that the judge would be unlikely to give her justice motivated out of a compassionate heart or even out of shame. But he will grant her justice to get her off his back and to avoid being 'worn out' (Literal trans.- suffering a "black eye" (i.e. the community's response to his hard heart.) This judge has demonstrated that he has no fear of God and no shame, but he is motivated by other things. Jesus makes the analogy between the Judge and God. If we selfish humans (e.g. in this case the judge) will respond and carry out justice, would

not our loving God do the same for His chosen ones? When have you experienced this?

7) In this story we have the poor politically powerless widow who approaches the judge; a person with the power to obtain the justice that she needs. At first, presuming that he was a just judge, she would have appealed to the judge's higher sensibilities; 1) compassion for the 'underdog' and 2) conscience (e.g. fear of the Lord and respect for His standards). It seems that the initial appeals were unsuccessful; as the text states, the judge tells us that he does not have compassion for the vulnerable ones, nor does he have a fear of the Lord (respect for His standards). Since the vulnerable one is not able to accomplish justice by appealing to the judges higher sensibilities (i.e. compassion and justice/fear of the Lord, respect for His standards), the vulnerable one ends up obtaining justice by appealing to the unjust judge's lower sensibilities (i.e. worldly fears—losing the respect of the community, losing status, losing money) 'lest she wear me out' (literally, 'give me a black eye'). All people are motivated out of a combination of worldly fears and aspirations (ie. pursuit of and/or fear of loss of status, money power) and Godly fears (ie. not wanting to offend God....or potentially lose His friendship). In what ways does God ask us as Baptized Christians to operate out of our higher sensibilities (ie. love for God and neighbor) rather than our more base nature (e.g. hopes for worldly gains....fear of worldly losses)? In what ways are our lives much more peaceful and filled with love when we are operating out of Godly motivations (i.e. love of God and love of neighbor)? What is the qualitative difference between a Godly fear and a worldly fear? What is the difference between a worldly sorrow (e.g. sorry I had to pay the fine, sorry I got caught) and a Godly sorrow (e.g. I am sorry I hurt someone, or hurt my relationship with God)? What is the relationship between worldly sorrow vs. a Godly sorrow and a worldly fear vs. a Godly fear and our own sanctification process?

8) Jesus makes it clear that God will not delay in handing out justice, but that He will 'quickly grant justice'. When have you experienced God's speedy response to one who has been unjustly treated?

9) In Verse 8, Jesus says "When the Son of Man comes (Jesus in the Second Coming), will He find faith on earth?" What does Jesus mean by this? It seems that Jesus is articulating a concern that the delay in His Second coming may discourage people to the point where they will resort to playing by the world's rules (like the Judge, with little to no compassion for the vulnerable ones, and little to no fear of God) instead of by 'God's Rules' (love for others and a holy respect for His Ways). In what way is Faith required to play by "God's rules" in a world filled with evil and strife? In what ways are we

operating out of fear (and other base human instincts) when we succumb to playing by the 'world's rules' (e.g. expediency, lack of compassion, selfish protection of one's own comfort and gain)? How can we invite Jesus to help us live this life playing by God's Rules? How does playing by God's Rules naturally demonstrate God's victory over evil sin and death, and naturally spread His Kingdom here on earth? (naturally Evangelize?)