

Jeremiah 31:27-34/Luke 18:1-8

“...Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

This very last verse in today's gospel plays a pivotal role in our understanding of Jesus' purpose or concern in telling this parable. I am sure that the Church today shares the same concern with Jesus; “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” In fact, the situation might have been better during the time of Jesus because today the world is becoming more and more unreligious everyday. For the past couple of weeks, we have been reading about the parables of the kingdom of God. Today's gospel reading is addressing a seemingly related subject i.e., the “Parousia” (The Second Coming of Jesus). These two concepts are inseparable. In today's gospel, Luke's audience was experiencing persecution and they did not have capacity to defend themselves. So, their only hope was in the second coming of the Messiah (Parousia). They expected Christ to return imminently to vindicate them and to end their suffering. However, the Parousia seemed long overdue, and disciples were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their faith. So, Luke 18:1-8 continues to address the issues of faith in difficult times, and reassures the disciples that God hears their prayers. Darkest days are a perfect test to our hope, we need to remain steadfast in faith. It tells us that discipleship is not an easy road but reminds us that God will vindicate faithful disciples. The parable yes amplifies the character of the persistent widow, but more importantly, it tells us of the character of God. A God who answers prayers. If the unjust ruler can listen, what more about the just God.

The parable raises an intriguing theological question: Is the purpose of prayer only to bring our hearts into line with God's will or does it also change God's mind? This parable is a parable of persistence, endurance, consistent and patience. In most cases, we expect instant answers from God. We expect physicians to give instant relief. We expect technology to provide instant communication. We expect the stock market to bestow instant wealth. But God does not promise instant answers to prayer. If He answers instantly, then consider it a blessing!

“There was a judge in a certain city who did not fear God and did not respect people” (v. 2). The judge and widow represent opposite ends of the social

spectrum. The judge is the epitome of power, bound by neither jury decisions nor courts of appeal and the widow is the epitome of powerlessness.

In Deuteronomy 1:16-17 Moses charged judges to render fair and honest decisions irrespective of the wealth or social standing of the petitioner but we cannot expect justice from this judge, **who does not fear God or respect people**. Fearing God is a positive attribute in both Old and New Testaments. When Jehoshaphat appointed judges over Judah, he instructed them, **“Now therefore let the fear of Yahweh be on you. Take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with Yahweh our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes”** (2 Chronicles 19:7). Luke (1:50) has mentioned that God’s **“mercy is for generations of generations on those who fear him”**.

“A widow was in that city, and she often came to him, saying, ‘Defend me from my adversary!’ (v. 3). Widows were symbols of vulnerability in both Old and New Testament. With no means of support, they were dependent their grown children, or on charity. Because of their vulnerability, the scriptures demand protection for widows: Deuteronomy 10:18-19, God has a special affection for widows, orphans, and aliens; Deuteronomy 24:17-21; and Luke 20:47, Jesus condemns those “who devour widow’s houses”.

This widow, like the man who demanded bread from his neighbor in the middle of the night (Luke 11:5-8), persists in asking. Her aggressive character is unusual for a woman in that patriarchal society, but she has the weight of scripture and justice on her side. She dwells on high moral ground. This judge would not tolerate this nagging behavior by a man, but even a judge who knows no shame must exercise forbearance in the presence of a woman who enjoys the protection of scripture and the sympathy of the community.

“He wouldn’t for a while” (v. 4a). Perhaps the judge was waiting for a bribe. Perhaps he reserves favorable treatment for wealthier or more influential people. However, this woman did not behave the obvious manner, instead of negotiating and bribing, she kept of nagging, standing tall on her moral ground.

“But afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God, nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will defend her, or else she will wear me out by

her continual coming" (vv. 4b-5). While the judge cares nothing for God or man, he recognizes that this woman can create problems for him. There are two possibilities for the judge's concern:

- One is that he is simply tired of her nagging presence and wants to get rid of her.
- The other is that he might get a "black eye" in the community for mistreating a widow. Whatever assumption makes no difference to our understanding of this. This judge is not a "stand-in" for God. Instead, this parable contrasts this evil judge with our loving God.

Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater. If the unjust judge will do the right thing for this widow, even if for the wrong reasons, can't we expect God to do the right thing for us? Can't we expect a loving God vindicate "his chosen ones"? The widow asks only justice and the judge grants only justice. This parable does not suggest that God writes blank checks. Instead, unceasing prayer grinds away at the sharp edges of our lives until our will is conformed to God's redemptive purposes, making it right for God to answer our prayers. In difficult times, we hear people say, "The only thing that we can do is to pray", as if prayer is a weak substitute for meaningful remedies. This parable teaches us that prayer is itself a meaningful remedy, that it engages God's power, making everything possible.

"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (v. 8b). This is the point of the parable. Jesus wonders if he will find faith when he returns at the end of time. He implies that persistent faith is possible where there is persistent prayer. The faithful will pray, and their prayers will increase their faith.

Everyone else had given up on this unjust judge, it was no longer a secret that he did not fear God nor consider people, for him to listen to you should at list pay something but the persistent widow proved everyone wrong, with faith and persistence it can be done. The faithful will pray, and their prayers will increase their faith, and surely God listens and answers. **Amen.**