

# The 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time—October 20, 2019

Wow ! What a challenging selection of Readings, again. It is rather unusual for all three readings to hold the very same theme on a given weekend, you may have noticed ! Yes .... the theme is clear ! It is about Persistence ! Being persistent in Prayer and also in Good works ! It is something everyone of us has believed in our lives ..... Having the right combination of prayer and determined action tends to bring the best results.

The 1st Reading deals with the experience of Moses praying for the people of Israel, whom he is leading out of Egypt at the behest of God. This was a very treacherous journey ..... in fact, it is a great foreboding of our own journey in the Christian Life as we move toward The Promised Land. Our Journey to the Promised Land is also fraught with danger and terror ! It is tough trying to be a Christian !

The attack of Amalek, was the attack of a people ..... a desert tribe living south of the Dead Sea, the Amalekites. The Amalekites perceived a threat from these immigrants, passing through their territory, a threat to their homes, family, property, and so they respond to the perceived threat.

“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. Moses’ hands , however grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset.”

What an interesting perspective! What do you hear and understand in this whole scene ? What is God revealing to me in this passage ? Think of this question ? What are some of the stones I use to support my own prayer ..... am I demonizing or denigrating the other in my prayer—asking God to intervene in this injustice ? Is my prayer persistent and open, or is it haphazard ? Does my prayer reflect an openness to God’s response ..... what He might be trying to teach me ..... or is my prayer closed .... where I am telling God what He needs to do? ..... How He should respond to this situation? Do I tend to have a lot of predetermined notions when I come to prayer ? Is my prayer asking? Is it seeking ? Or, is it more or less letting God know what He needs to do ?

This brings us to the Gospel. What an interesting parable Jesus tells ! What do you make of it ? What do you hear .. I mean really hear in this parable ? It just doesn’t appear to be the Jesus I have come to know and love ! Do you agree ? It appears to be out of harmony with so much of his teaching ! Yes ? So how can we make sense of this parable ?

We have always understood this parable to mean that we have got to be persevering in prayer and then God will answer our prayer ..... Right ? And the widow in this

town .....a poor widow, is relentless in her pursuit of justice against her adversary ..... she follows the 'unjust' judge day and night saying :

“Render a just decision for me against my adversary”

Out of a sense of fear, intimidation, and personal bother, the ‘Unjust Judge’ delivers a just decision in her favor. Now, how is this like the God that has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ? We have come to an understanding of sorts in regard to this parable :

We say : ‘If the unjust judge because of the persistence of this widow, provides her a just decision ..... Then how much more will “The Just Judge” God Himself provide a just decision for us if we are persistent. Right ? This is what we have believed all of this time, RIGHT ?

Let’s examine the story more closely ! Let’s begin at the end and make our way back to the beginning ! The end of this experience has Jesus pose this question :

“But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth ?

Wow ..... What a large and looming question! It is a question each of us has got to answer to ourselves ! Will I have faith when the Son of Man comes ? Will I be persistent in prayer when the Son of Man comes ? Or, will I have given up on prayer and faith ..... because it was too difficult .... too demanding ! This gives us a new perspective!

So, what if the parable is not the way we have understood it for all of these years ? Fr. Bill Bausch, a retired New Jersey priest, in his book “Once upon a Gospel” says : “I have reservations about equating the judge in today’s Gospel with God.” He asks : “Is the message that if you badger God long enough you can eventually wear God down and get what you want ?”

Bill suggests there is a more fruitful and less obvious —and unexpected way to understand this Gospel ! Why not see the widow, not the judge, as the image of God ? Once you reverse the characters, then a whole new perspective emerges. That is to say, when the widow is seen as a God-like figure, then the message of the parable becomes crystal clear : Anyone who determinedly resists injustice — — faces it, names it, and denounces it until right is achieved — —is acting as God does ...is God-Like ! Powerless, as Jesus on the cross, who defeats the power of death, the widow achieves victory for right.

Through her persistence, the widow becomes a kind of Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, or Mother Teresa of Calcutta ! Justice achieved through non-violence ! Against all of the odds, she will endure until justice is done and God is made present. Now we have a totally different parable !

The parable may be more about the question : “ When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth” ? The parable is not about strategies to wear down a reluctant God with non-stop prayer. It is about being like God, and acting like God. It is being persistent in Prayer and not giving up. And it is about being persistent in seeking justice and the good of others ..... sometimes against what appears to be insurmountable odds. It is about maintaining Faith in God and His plan, and praying fervently, while seeking God’s Plan for all of His people to come to fulfillment ..... not our own limited Plans !

— Fr. Gerry Hurley