

## **TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: 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?"

### **REFLECTION 1: PRAY ALWAYS – DON'T LOSE HEART**

Whenever I look at a match on TV, be it rugby, soccer, hurling or Gaelic football, regardless of who's playing, I always want to cheer for the underdog. Perhaps it was this shift towards the weaker side that urged Jesus to relate today's parable to his disciples. Were they the underdogs struggling against a Jewish or Roman bureaucracy that would rather be rid of them, just as the unjust judge wished to be rid of the bothersome widow? In today's Gospel Jesus instructs his disciples that the only way to cultivate faith and prepare for the final reckoning will be through prayer – persistent and unrelenting prayer. You see, prayer is the lifeline of every believer, linking each of us to God and to one another. Our prayer may be whispered in private but since we are social beings, prayer's influence is truly communal. Prayer has been described as standing in truth before God. But prayer is also what happens when we venture into the company of others to love and be loved, to serve, to care, to listen and to learn.

Today's readings highlight a necessary quality of prayer – persistence. So, in our first reading from Exodus, Moses featured as persevering in prayer with the equally persistent Aaron and Hur. The widow's power to persist until she is granted a hearing is designed to inspire the same quality in the disciples of the Lucan Jesus (Luke 18:1-8). The story is wonderfully simple. A judge of a small town enjoys absolute power. He has no time for God or for his fellow human beings. He seems like one of those of whom the Psalmist asks, 'How long will you judge unjustly and favour the cause of the wicked? Defend the lowly and the fatherless; render justice to the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the lowly and the poor; from the hand of the wicked deliver them' (Psalm 82: 2-4). Against this powerful man comes a widow, a type of the weak and defenceless, she asks, 'Give me my rights against my opponent'. But the judge is unmoved, he doesn't care about God and scoffs at others, so he decides to give her justice reluctantly in order to be rid of her and to stop her pestering him. It would be absurd to imagine that God, the just judge is insensitive to persevering prayer. Far from it, he intervenes swiftly so as to give us justice (Salvation). The issue is one of faith – faith in a God who saves, faith in Jesus Christ the Son of Man who will come again, a faith that must always be reawakened in us, without losing heart.

Timothy, in our second reading today, is encouraged to be persistent in learning, knowing and believing in the scriptures. Mother Teresa showed a similar persistence. She realized within herself a call to serve God's poorest, but she felt helpless to ease her lot. "I knew where I belonged, but I did not know how to get there", she remarked. Nevertheless, through prayer and persistence and considerable paperwork, she eventually made her way to the streets of Calcutta. There she worked till she died, all the time attributing her efforts to prayer. She wrote, 'Everything starts with prayer. Prayer enables us to love,

and with a clean heart to see God in others and radiate God's love to them. Prayer means trusting without growing weary and persisting without resorting to anger'.

Finally, as we noted before, Luke lays great stress on prayer and in his second book – Acts – he emphasizes that the primitive Christian community was diligent in its practice; 'They devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers (Acts 2: 42).

## **REFLECTION 2: BE PERSISTENT**

A widely circulated story about Thomas Edison says that when he was refining the ordinary light bulb, he failed a thousand times before he found a long-lasting filament. Today's Gospel parable of the persistent widow is a wonderful lesson in persistence. It tells that we should keep on trying when faced with a stubborn dilemma. If we walk away, we lose. If we keep trying we will find eventually that our persistence pays off.

The judge in this parable was one of the paid magistrates appointed by Herod or by the Romans. Popularly they were called the 'robber judges', notorious for their corruption. The widow on the other hand was a symbol of all who were poor and defenceless. It was obvious that she, without resources of any kind, had no hope of ever extracting justice from such a judge. But she had one weapon - persistence. It is possible that what in the end the judge feared was actual physical violence. 'Lest she exhausts me' can mean lest she gives me a black eye! So, to avoid assault and battery the judge relented. Jesus was simply saying, 'If, in the end, a corrupt judge can be wearied into giving a widow justice, how much more will the God, who is a loving Father, give his children what they want?'

That is true, but it is no reason why we should expect to get whatever we pray for. Often a father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks would hurt rather than help. God is like that. We do not know what is to happen in the next hour, let alone the next week or month or year. Only God sees time whole and knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus said that we should never be discouraged in prayer. That is why he wondered if human faith would stand the long delays before the Son of man should come. We will never grow weary in prayer and our faith will never falter, if after we have offered to God our prayers and requests, we add the perfect prayer, the Our Father, 'thy will be done'. As Mrs Leon Walters once said 'God, give me the determination and tenacity of a weed'.