

Homily for Sunday, October 19, 2025



Usually, in the world of storytelling, the storyteller tells a story or a parable, has the listeners puzzle the story in their mind for a while, and then the storyteller gives the lesson. Just this one time, though, our storyteller, Luke, does it the opposite way. He gives the meaning before the story. This is not a good way of telling a story by giving the meaning ahead of time. It pre-empts the listeners' response to the story by saying, "this, and this alone, is what I want

you go get out of this story." The opening line of today's gospel says that Jesus told a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. So, now we know up front what the parable is going to be about. It's going to be about praying always and not losing heart. Or, to put it another way, it's about persevering in prayer to God and persevering against injustice. Got it? Good. Here comes the parable now.

We have a judge whom we are told has no fear of God and no respect of people. Great. Good luck to anyone who comes before this judge's bench. And we have a widow who is seeking justice against her opponent. According to Jewish Law, the widow has every right to ask for justice (see Dt. 24:17). But since the judge has no fear of God, he couldn't care less about the fact his Jewish faith demands that he's supposed to care for widows and orphans. So, saying to him, "If you don't stand

for justice, eventually God will punish you” will make no difference to him at all. He doesn’t fear God. Period. And saying to him, “Don’t you think these poor people deserve justice?” will not work either because he admits, himself, that he has no respect for people. Trying to appeal to this judge’s better side is a waste of time. He doesn’t have one. He’s not open to God, and he can’t even be decent to people in need.

Our only other character is a widow. She knows that in the patriarchal society of her time, the moment her husband dies, the land she was living on could be appropriated by someone else, and she wouldn’t have a shot at getting it back. In Hebrew the word for widow means “one who has no voice.” Yet her voice is all she has. Persistence is not her fallback strategy; it’s her only strategy. Now we know why the meaning of this story was given at the beginning—we are to persevere in prayer until justice is rendered. When we are up against a wall, like this widow was, and we cannot even formulate a pray, St. Paul tells us that it is then that the Spirit persists and keeps praying in us.

The widow believes in praying always and not losing heart. Praying always doesn’t mean you’re on your knees or at church 24/7. It means you’re open to God. She was open but the judge wasn’t. Always pray means the channel between God and the human person remains open. Divine energy will not just periodically spurt up when we need it and then dry up again until the next time we need it. Without pushing itself on us, divine energy wants to be a steady, empowering flow in our lives at all times. Our job is to be like the widow and to stay open to the divine flow within us. That’s what prayer is.

Notice the judge never speaks out loud in this parable. While he initially refuses justice to this widow, he ends up talking to himself. If you live alone, you do a lot of this talking to yourself. (I've called the clock radio and the T.V. remote every dirty name imaginable). Inner monologues happen a lot in the Gospel of Luke. Luke likes inner monologues because they get us into the interior of the character. So, the judge says to himself, ***“Even though I have no fear of God and no respect for any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice.”*** He's clearly being bothered by her and doesn't like it.

In Greek, the language this story was written in, to bother someone literally meant to “work them over” or to “give someone a black eye.” “Giving a black eye” is an image for tarnishing someone's reputation. A judge is supposed to give justice, but he is not doing that. What he fears in this woman, who keeps bothering him, is that she will show him up as an unjust judge. He does not want this. He wants the pretense of justice on the outside even though he is not committed to justice on the inside. He wants to be known as just but fears he will be exposed as a hypocrite. So, he caves into her request. Not because he has a change of heart and wants to show compassion--not a chance. This encounter with the widow didn't change him one bit. The parable doesn't end with telling us that the judge had a conversion experience, changed his heart, began to open to God and to respect human beings. Not a chance. His own self-interest made him change. It bothered the hell out of him that this woman kept coming to his courthouse demanding justice, the very thing he didn't want to give her. That's

the only reason he granted it to her—just to get her out of his hair...or his powdered wig.

A wrong way to interpret this parable is to image God as being the judge, and if we just pile on the prayers, eventually we will wear God down to the point where God will grant what we want just to get us out of God's hair. ***“Will God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?”*** We are supposed to answer with a resounding “YES!” ***“Will he delay long in helping them?”*** We are supposed to answer with a resounding “NO!” God is not the judge, but more like the persistent widow, never giving up on us, never failing to hear our prayers, and always fighting for justice for the voiceless ones of our world. Even when we fail to hear the voice of the prophets in our day, they continue to speak. They are the ones who are often nameless like the widow. Yet, they persevere in prayer, in openness to God, and God fills their hearts with justice.

When the Son of Man comes—when it's all over—***will he find faith on earth?*** Will he find people-- who against all odds--are committed to justice, to peace, to care for the poor and the environment? When we are not the prophets, upon his return, will the Son of Man find the rest of us holding up the arms of the prophets who grow tired like Aaron and Hur held up the tired arms of Moses?

Pray always, and do not lose heart. Joshua eventually defeats Amalek. The mustard seed eventually becomes a great tree housing all the birds of the earth. The unjust judge eventually caves in. And the kingdom eventually comes.

~Fr. Phil