

The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grace

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year C

Exodus 17:8-13

Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Have you ever felt like you were being ignored? ...that no one was paying any attention to you and that your efforts and your appeals were falling on deaf ears? I suppose everyone has had that experience with children, parents, teachers, students, bosses – there is probably no one with whom we have not had that experience at one time or another.

Have we ever had that experience with God? Have we ever prayed (or at least hoped) earnestly for something, believing that if we just pray hard enough it will come to pass – and then it did not? “It’s not fair,” we say. “We’ve prayed so hard – and nothing.”

In the Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8 -- Gospel Reading for the 29th Sunday of Year C) our just and loving God appears to be compared to an unjust and corrupt judge. We are even less encouraged as we relate to the widow who appeals to the unjust judge as many of us would appeal in prayer to God. However, our focus should be not so much on the judge, or even on the corruption, but rather on the persistence of the widow in her demand for justice. The corruption of the unjust judge to whom she appeals makes the situation appear all the more hopeless and

2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

Luke 18:1-8

pointless. Despite this, however, the widow succeeds. The judge gives her the justice he originally denied, if for no other reason than to finally be rid of her.

We find examples of this persistence in the face of frustration throughout our Church’s history, not only when appealing to God, but also on the human level. For example, it was the relentless haranguing of

St. Catherine of Sienna that finally persuaded Pope Gregory XI to return the Papacy to Rome after it spent seventy years in Avignon, France. An example, more closely resembling the protagonist of the parable, is St. Monica. Monica had so much stacked against her in a pagan, Roman society. She faced failure as a Christian parent when her son, Augustine, strayed so far and so long from the faith. Nevertheless, she is known principally for her relentless tears and prayers to God (and one could imagine her nag-

ging of her son to a fair degree) to which Augustine would later credit his eventual conversion.

In looking at this parable, however, one must remember that the “justice” demanded by the widow and denied by the judge is paralleled at the end of the Gospel to the “rights” and “justice” granted by God



The Parable of the Unjust Judge

to those who ask him. These are not always granted in the manner or degree that we would have them, since God responds according to his own rather than to human standards. Jesus' teaching does not limit God's granting of our prayers to simply whatever we pray for. Rather, He teaches that God gives us the grace to be holy, faithful and persevering in our living the Gospel and encouraging one another to do the same.

In another part of the Gospel Jesus says, "ask and you shall receive." But he does not say we will necessarily receive what we ask for. "Seek and you shall find," but not necessarily what we are looking for. "Knock and the door shall be opened," but it may not be the door on which we happen to be knocking at the time.

For Moses, in the first reading, his prayers (and keeping his hands raised) resulted in God granting victory to Israel against Amalek. In the second reading Paul points out to Timothy that God has already granted us many answers in the Scriptures as

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well as the teachings we cling to as people of faith, if we only have the resourcefulness to recognize them. The Gospel message is clear: persevere – never give up. Never give in to discouragement when things don't seem to be going our way. Never lose hope when disappointment comes, when as a people of faith we take some knocks because our values are at odds with mainstream public opinion. When God appears to be ignoring our endless cries for justice, grace and strength we must "hang in there."

Jesus puts it plainly at the conclusion of our Gospel reading. When all is said and done we must persevere in faith that God will hear and answer our prayers in a manner suited to His purpose. But, Jesus ends with a very simple question. Does that type of faith indeed still exist? If Christ were to return today, would he find such faith on earth?

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