

The Twenty Ninth Week in Ordinary Time
October 16, 2016

When we meet the judge of today's parable, we learn that a certain widow is having problems appealing to his good side — because apparently he doesn't have one. So, faced with his stony heart, she becomes like water that drips incessantly until something is worn away.

To fully understand this parable we should pay careful attention to the fact that this is a parable about praying always *and* about never giving up. It's important to recognize that those are two interrelated ideas: to be constantly mindful of our relationship with God, and to persist in faith. Because you can't have one without the other.

Interpreting the parable in that light may open a new way of understanding what Jesus is trying to teach us.

The widow represents the praying disciple, while the judge represents those who promote injustice. Okay. Then for what is the widow to pray? For whom does Jesus tell us to pray?

If we search the Gospel of Luke we'll never find Jesus saying, "Pray for one another," instead he says, "Pray for those who mistreat you." The only time in Luke's Gospel Jesus said he prayed for someone, he said it to Peter: "I have prayed that your own faith may not fail."

The implication seems to be that in a situation of seemingly endless injustice, especially when we have no power to change it, we are called to pray for those who have the power as well as for those who instigate injustice.

Now while those people who are represented by the widow are told to keep praying, Jesus doesn't say to do so in hiding. Instead, the widow's persistence is more than obvious to the judge and probably to the general public.

She's kind of like the Energizer Bunny; she just keeps going and going with her demand for justice. It was kind of like a staring contest between two 10-year-olds: In the end, one of them had to give up.

After all, being a poor widow, her circumstances were bad enough that she would probably die if her demands weren't met. And since the judge wouldn't move for love of God or human respect, she got him where it counted – his desire for peace and quiet.

This is a story of salvation, but not as it appears at first glance. Sure, the widow finally got her due, but in the process she won salvation for the judge. She never gave up in her prayer or in the actions that flowed from it.

She kept at it, asking for divine help while also devising the tactics that had the best chance of success. In other words, she won salvation for the judge when she made it easier for him to make a right decision rather than a bad one.

So when we look to the widow as a model of prayer, she actually gives a deeper meaning to the prayer we often make without thinking, "Thy kingdom come."

In spite of what everyone knew and said about the judge, she would not stop believing that God could transform his heart.

She refused to give in to the idea that he would never change. Like Moses, who kept holding up his staff over the outnumbered Israelite army, she refused to give up. There was no *earthly* reason to expect success, because if there had been, she wouldn't have needed to pray like she did.

Of course, Jesus' audience probably thought the story mildly amusing as they pictured the pompous judge coming around to do what the lady asked, trying to preserve his dignity. But Jesus' last remark was designed to get his disciples' attention: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

That also happens to be the question addressed to each of us.

Do we really believe God's kingdom is present and growing among us now? How far are we willing to go to cultivate it? Are we faith-filled enough to pray for those who mistreat us and for those who promote injustice?

Do we desire the kind of faith that leads us to persist, as 2nd Timothy suggests, whether it is convenient or inconvenient?

As we look around at our political situation, at the injustice and violence that plague our country and world, there is no *earthly* reason to believe that it can all change.

And that's precisely why our widow friend is held up to us as an example. Weariness, convenience, apathy are never excuses we are permitted to make.

We know that prayer has been found to be effective in our lives. Prayer will awaken our memory of Jesus and remind us that the kingdom doesn't operate by the same rules that the world does. Only prayer will open us to the grace to overcome the inevitable disillusionments we meet in life.

Only prayer can open us to the inspirations that will keep us going, and going, and going ... until we finally achieve true justice that is at the heart of God's Kingdom on earth.