

Always pray and not lose heart

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 18:1-8. Following a passion prediction, Luke introduces a parable by Jesus that speaks about the necessity of continual prayer.

The disciples would soon be discouraged by their weaknesses and the death of Jesus. Jesus urges them to “*always pray and not lose heart*” (v. 1). He then launches into a parable that speaks to the fervency of prayer.

From OT times the gate area of an Israelite city was the central place for commerce and the dispensing of law. There judges – often the wise elders of the community, who had many civic responsibilities – would hear cases and administer justice fairly.

One difficulty is to sort out the relationship between the judge and the widow. There could not be a greater contrast than the one between these two people. The judge holds all the cards; the widow, particularly in ancient society, is helpless. His sin of callousness is especially serious because judges were to represent God. The widow’s behavior is also unusual, but in that culture, a woman could act as she does, pestering the judge.

In both testaments widows often suffered abuse at the hands of those better off. This widow has an adversary, an opponent in the matter of justice. Perhaps she had been defrauded or victimized by a scam, as many elderly are today. Her husband was dead, and she apparently had no relative or friend to intercede in her behalf.

The judge waits for a long time before he acts, but *even though he does not fear God nor respect people*, he decides to vindicate this poor widow on account of her persistence.

God is not an unrighteous judge. But if even an unrighteous man will give justice to the persistent, how much more will our righteous God do so? (TLSB) God will not delay his support of the chosen ones when they are right. He is not like the unjust judge, who had to be badgered until he wearied and gave in. He not only urges us to be relentless in prayer, but he imparts full confidence that he will hear and answer.

Jesus ends this text by asking, “*when the Son Man comes will he find faith on earth?*” (v. 8) this is a rhetorical question, urging faithfulness, which is the key ingredient in the prayers of the saints. (TLSB)

Prayer: Lord, grant me enduring faith and persistence in the face of every trouble. Amen. (TLSB)