



Luke 18:1–8

*And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?
Will he keep putting them off?
I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.*

October 16, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scripture: Exodus 17: 8-13 • 2 Timothy 3: 14-4-5 • Luke 18: 1-8

I believe it is safe to say that most people in the Community of Christ and many other people of faith, at least those whom I've known throughout my life, consider themselves "persistent prayers." And of course, they don't pray around the clock 24/7, but they do have a consistent habit of praying: daily prayer, prayer before meals, prayer at certain critical moments of life and acts of faith, hope and charity. This does not mean either that they are stuck on numbers, imagining that more is always better. Just the opposite, it's about establishing a manner of being prayerful rather than giving an occasional nod and a wink toward the One who guides every moment of our life. In short, prayer is a way of life for most Christians and other spiritually dedicated people. Given those assumptions, let's think a little about this way of being prayerful that we have learned and nurtured from our childhood.

We have a ready example for this in Luke's gospel. Luke introduces the topic by writing that Jesus once told a story about a persistent widow who kept hammering away at a certain obstinate judge, demanding that he decide a certain case for her. Immediately, therefore, we know that this is going to be a story about a widow who feels aggrieved. She will not give up until she receives justice. Finally, the judge decides that she is wearing out his patience and decides in her favor. (Not a great motive for justice perhaps, but at least he did move slowly in her regard!)

So, having read only this far, you might imagine that this story is all about a certain Jewish court issue. Not so! If you read farther, you will find that Jesus only uses the story to speak about the importance of persistence in being and persistence in prayer. We already know Jesus' attitude about multiplying prayers when in Matthew's gospel we read: *"When you pray, do not babble on like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words" (Matthew 6:7)*. Jesus, obviously, is not talking about multiplication but about persistence, determination or doggedness. "Do not become weary," Jesus, says, "do not succumb to discouragement."

That, of course, brings up a very human problem we all face when we pray, particularly in what we call the prayer of intercession, sometimes humorously referred to as the "gimme prayers." "Lord, I want this or that and the sooner the better. I want it and I want it now, not later. I want a raise in salary now, I want to be

admitted to an Ivy League school now, I want to be cured of this illness now, I want justice now.

Of course, it's not unlikely that we should choose to pray like this: first of all, because, for us earthlings, time is an important element in life. We just do not have the time or the patience to wait for something that's of ultimate importance to us to happen.

The problem with this attitude, however, is the problem of time: our time and God's time. Secondly, given our limited sense of time, we have so little patience. We want the horror of war to cease now, justice be done for the under-privileged now, discrimination to be silenced now, tolerance be shown to all now! Unfortunately, of course, we have little control over the time element of our plea. Should that prevent us from making our plea? Absolutely not! The prayer of intercession is not about being heard now; it more about voicing our persistent feelings about the inequalities; the inequities in this world where we live, work and pray.

So, admittedly, the word wait is not a term we very much like to hear. "Justice delayed is justice denied," said Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Nonetheless, Dr. King's continuing and persistent cry for justice over the years has slowly continued to make it happen.

So too, therefore regarding the rest of us as we plead each day for so many things in this broken world: We may not receive all that we demand or hope for in life, but the fact that we persistently let God know that we are still concerned is at least a step in the right direction.



Do Not Grow Weary and Lose Heart

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and "perfecter" of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." -Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12 begins with one of the most encouraging introductions of any chapter in the Bible. Why? Its focus is to not grow weary and lose

heart. As followers of Jesus, we endure many struggles. The natural temptation is to become discouraged, perhaps even to the point of giving up. But this is not God's desire for us. Instead, he calls us to persevere. How? By focusing our eyes on Jesus.

Perhaps one of the reasons Jesus came to earth was simply for those of us who believe to focus on him. We have a God who came in a physical form and experienced life just as we do. This gives us much comfort that he knows our experiences, can relate to them, and longs to encourage us in the process.

Today, do not grow weary. Look to Jesus. See him. When you do, you will find the strength to carry on no matter what today might bring.