

## 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C)

- When Jesus tells this parable about the widow & the judge, he's painting a picture about God for us; it's not to suggest that God needs to be worn down by persistence, but rather it's a description of what God is not like.
- If such a wicked & unjust judge can eventually be worn down, how much more quickly will God respond to a just cause that God also cares about?
- And yet the parable is told to also reinforce the need to pray continually.
- The continuous prayer is not to wear God down – like the judge – but rather, to demonstrate genuine need & align ourselves with the mind of God.
- Otherwise the parable can portray God as a remote & severe figure whom we need to convince before he will be moved by our plight; & yet today's Gospel is often used to support this idea.
- The persistent widow seems to get her way because she nags the judge into submission.
- While Jesus praises her endurance, he tells the disciples that God is NOT like the judge, but rather that God will quickly attend to our needs, rather than see us cry out all night.
- There is a long & venerable tradition in the Church that prayer can influence God's will. Our belief in the power of intercession is predicated on this.
- This tradition holds that God regularly & actively intervenes to effect good outcomes in the world.
- This is valid & is the basis for our praying individually & communally to God to effect change for good & right causes – sometimes the seemingly impossible becomes reality, but the problem with this thinking is a belief that an all-knowing, unchanging God changes his mind in response to our petitions.
- Furthermore God's interventions in the world are fine if all the decisions are running our way, but what happens when they run against us?
- It can minimise our free will & suggest that we can change God's mind.
- If most of our petitions are focused on what God can do, it shifts all the responsibility (& the blame) onto God.
- But an equally long & venerable tradition in the Church is that prayer **changes us**, but this tradition has had less airplay.
- Fasting, abstinence & pilgrimages, for example, don't change God, but are meant to change the person who undertakes them.
- These acts can enable us to be more responsive or receptive to whatever happens in life. It is this tradition that needs to be reclaimed.
- So - why pray? Who should pray?
- The older people get, the more educated, world-wise & sophisticated they become, prayer seems to become a childish thing to do – that it belongs in the life of children who are still innocent & not really aware of the real world.

- People even look back with nostalgia to the time when they as children did pray – associating it with a time of innocence.
- It's like prayer is akin to belief in Santa Claus & fairies.
- Times like our parish children's sacramental celebrations when we see this as a beautiful step in their lives, can reinforce this thinking that prayer belongs to the life of children.
- If our children gain this message from us as adults, then it's no wonder that as our children grow up, they can grow out of a praying community & grow out of prayer.
- Or many see prayer as a job for the specialists – priests, nuns etc., or that only particularly religious people pray - people who go to church, or a mosque, or a synagogue, & some people who do pray say they don't need a community to pray because it's too formalised – they can & do pray on their own & need no one else to do this.
- And even those of us who do pray regularly can sometimes consider it a chore & think that we're doing it for God.
- And here's the irony – there is a deep hunger for prayer & spirituality, because people need to get in touch with their inner selves, as a way of dealing with the struggles & demands of living in a modern world.
- Maybe people have got disillusioned with prayer, as they've come to understand it, because they haven't got what they've prayed for & so it seems futile.
- When I was in the seminary, training to be a priest, I read many of the copious amounts of books on prayer.
- I thought that if I was going to be a priest, then I need to know about prayer & ways of prayer to be close to God – I had to be a prayerful person if I was to be credible as a priest.
- This wasn't wrong in itself, but I tended to see prayer just as a duty & part of my job as a priest.
- But it was only in times of crisis or struggle that prayer came from the heart because I needed God desperately at those times.
- It was with time that I slowly discovered that prayer is something I need to live by as much as I need air to breathe.
- Prayer is about accepting that I am dependent on God, that I need to spend time with him to know him, but even moreso, to know myself.
- And communal prayer – as we do at Mass – is the acknowledgement that I am not on my own in my needs & that I need others to pray for the needs of the world.
- Prayer **does** make a difference – it sustains us personally & as a community.
- Those who truly pray never lose heart or hope because they can see something of a bigger picture.

- When we turn our thoughts to God, we feel a new strength in our deeper selves & we can begin to see things we never saw before & see familiar things & people in a new light – with a sense of gratitude.
- Prayer clarifies our hopes & our intentions; it helps us discern between the important & trivial, it helps us to see things in true perspective; it helps us discover our true needs & aspirations & how to go about progressing towards them; Prayer teaches us what to aspire to & helps implant in us the ideals & goals we ought to treasure.
- Prayer isn't a cop-out from acting or doing, but acts like a beam of light into the darkness, helping us forward, directing & encouraging us to take the right course of action; it's not an escape from life, but a journey into the heart of life; through it we learn how to stand on our feet before God & the world & accept responsibility for our lives.
- Prayer isn't a strategy for occasional use when things are going badly, but the breath of our inner lives; it's not about asking things from God, but understanding & receiving what God wants to offer us.
- It's about living ordinary life more deeply – about being aware that God is much closer to us than we dare to believe, because prayer is essentially about God who reveals his love to us & can continue to create & mould us in order to act through us to effect change in the world.