

Reflection for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary time, Cycle C

1st Reading: *Exodus 17:8–13*

Intro: Our selection today is the story of the battle between the Israelites and Amalek which took place while the Israelites were wandering in the desert. The Staff of God, which Moses has, is the staff he had at the burning bush. Remember that he complained to God that no one would listen to him and God showed him, by turning the staff into a snake and back, that he would do the mighty works. Since that time it was called the Staff of God. This selection shows the power of symbolic action when it is acting out the will of God.

2nd Reading: *2 Timothy 3:14–4:2*

Intro: We skip ahead, again, to the end of a section in which Paul is warning Timothy against false teachings. In our selection, he tells him to be faithful as he describes the value of Scripture.

Gospel: *Luke 18:1–8*

But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Lk 18:8b

This Gospel is about faith, just like last week's selection was. Last week's selection ended with "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you." Lk 17:19. This week's selection ends with "But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Lk 18:8b

I have a friend who studied at Belmont Abbey. He was surprised, and even threatened, when the abbot shared that he was having a crisis of faith, finding it hard to believe that God even existed. This is not rare. Even Mother Theresa of Calcutta, St. Theresa, admitted to having at least two such faith crises. Her biggest problem, though, was the feeling that God had abandoned her.

When people tell me about having such crises of faith, I usually advise them that, when you have difficulty having faith, practice remaining faithful. Faith will eventually return and the practice of remaining faithful gets us there. When that happens, our faith is stronger than before the crisis.

I think a bigger problem may be people who never had faith in the first place. Maybe they went to Mass every Sunday with their parents and were enrolled in faith formation classes but never really appropriated the faith. Maybe they thought they had faith but never really felt the experience of the presence of the Lord in their lives. Maybe they learned to put their faith in other things, as Thomas Aquinas suggests, wealth, pleasure, power or honor. Maybe they never thought it important to have faith in God in their lives.

For them, my advice must sound like a "fake it till you make it" kind of thing. I'm not comfortable with the implications of that, the fake it part, but maybe it works. Maybe it is a way of opening oneself to the

experience of faith. Maybe some people don't know how to open themselves to an experience of the Lord.

So, what does that have to do with the widow in our story? It is not so much that she persisted in haranguing the judge but that she persisted in her faith. Prayer doesn't change God's mind. Haranguing Him has no effect on whether He grants us what we want, or not. God doesn't change, but we do. Prayer is about relationship with God and it strengthens our relationship, especially when we see and accept the answer, whatever it is. It is the acceptance of the answer that changes us.

So many people have prayed for healing for themselves or for a loved one. Many did not see physical healing happen but experienced, or saw their loved one experience, mental, emotional and/or spiritual healing. That's what faith does. It helps us embrace life, even when, and especially when, life seems to be slipping away. It helps us see that God is there, even when He seems to have abandoned us. It helps us see that He embraces us, even in, and especially in, our struggles and suffering. When we experience God's presence in our struggles and in our sufferings, we are given the strength to go on.

The widow in today's Gospel selection had no power of her own and had no one to fight for her. The judge, evidently, didn't care to give her a just sentence because she had nothing to give him. She only had God to depend on and He, evidently, gave her the strength to persist, knowing that she would be vindicated.¹

Will the Lord find us to be people of faith, when He comes?

Reflection

Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Lk 18:7-8

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon a time when your prayers seemed to go unanswered. Were your prayers part of a regular prayer life? Was the answer you received the answer you wanted? What did you learn from this experience? What can you do to increase your faith?

¹ This is the message of Job, who never gave up faith in God. See Job 19:25 "As for me, I know that my vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth on the dust."

Verse by Verse

Lk 18:1 “pray always” | Luke is not saying that God doesn’t respond unless you pester Him. Luke’s message is to continue to have faith that God cares even though it may seem like He is not hearing our prayer. This is evident from the final comment in this section “But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” Lk 18:8b

Lk 18:1 “without becoming weary” | The UBS Handbook on the Gospel of Luke says that what we translate as “without becoming weary” means without losing heart, without becoming discouraged or without giving up, “Without losing faith” might be a good translation to go with the meaning of this selection.

Lk 18:3 “and a widow in that town...” | Widows in Jesus’ time had no status. Without a husband, they had no one to represent them and had no power themselves.

Lk 18:6 “dishonest judge” | This has the same meaning as “dishonest steward” from Lk 16:1-8, one who does not do what his title implies. This judge presumably was not concerned about justice but rather what he could gain from granting favorable decisions to people of means.

Lk 18:7 “...who call out to him day and night?” | This may be a comment, not about their persistence, but about a general lack of justice on earth which causes constant prayers for help from many people.

Lk 18:7 “Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones...? Will he be slow to answer them?” | This comment shows that this parable is not about haranguing God but about God caring about us and answering our prayers.