

## **Saturday: Ordinary 32b**

Venables Convent

17 November 2018

Dear Sisters and friends in Christ:

### ***Introduction***

In today's Gospel, Jesus says that we are "to pray always and not to lose heart" (Lk 18:1). I would like to say a few words about our need to persevere in prayer. To do this, I want to focus on the parable of the nagging widow.

### ***Gospel Persistence***

As he often does, Jesus takes the immoral realities of our world as his point of departure to tell us a truth of his Kingdom. His parable begins with the stark contrast between two people: a heartless judge and a stalwart widow.

### ***Corrupt Judge***

The corrupt judge "who neither feared God nor had respect for any human being" (Lk 18:2) is *not* a model for us. To the widow seeking the justice denied her by some antagonist, the judge is complacent, refusing her somewhat cavalierly, and seeing in her only a bothersome woman unworthy of his attention.

### ***Widow***

The widow, on the other hand, is a sad instance of human powerlessness. "In the Bible, the widow and the orphan are the neediest categories, because they are defenceless and without means. The widow

goes to the judge and asks him for justice. Her possibilities of being heard are almost none, because the judge despises her and she can bring no pressure to bear on him. She cannot even appeal to religious principles because the judge does not fear God. Therefore this widow seems without any recourse.

But she insists. She is persistent and vigorous in a way that has marked many extraordinary women in the Church's history, like Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Dorothy Day, or fifteen-year old Therese Martin, begging Pope Leo XIII with real audacity to be allowed to enter

The widow, and those who imitate her down through the centuries, ask tirelessly, importuning, and in the end succeed in obtaining a result, whether from the judge in the case of the widow or from the Pope for Therese of Lisieux. They did not ask quietly, as if ashamed, for what they wanted. They cried aloud, even making themselves a nuisance.

The widow got her hearing because she never lost heart.

The lesson drawn by Jesus is crystal clear. We should cry to God like that. It is permissible to wrangle with God in the way the widow did with the unjust judge.

If the unprincipled judge gives in to the poor widow, how much more likely will the most just of all judges grant our requests when we plead before him!

## ***Badgering Complemented by Confidence***

Now, I don't for a moment want to suggest that prayer is a sure-fire technique for getting all the things we might desire: winning lottery tickets, holidays in Hawaii, or a good grade? God is not some cosmic bellhop who jumps because we ring the bell.

Our Heavenly Father, who is faithful and powerful, who desires only his children's good, hears our prayers always – but in his own time. “Faith assures us that God hears our prayers and grants them at the appropriate moment, although our daily experience seems to deny this certainty.”<sup>1</sup> We don't know “God's time,” but we are assured by his love that he does not, indeed *cannot*, turn a deaf ear.

The surprising point of Jesus' parable is that it is good *for us* to be persistent in prayer, never losing heart. It is an antidote to a society which wants everything “now.”

Another lesson of the parable is that we must bring faith to our prayer. It is not mechanical asking, but the offering of our heart: a time when, as Blessed John Henry Newman says, “heart speaks unto heart,” *cor ad cor loquitur*. We should persist in our prayers to him, not just because we need his help, but primarily because we want to stay in touch with this wonderful Person, who loves us unconditionally. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Naples (21 October 2007).

long run, this loving God will give us all that we need . . . and much more.

The Gospel insists that we should be persistent in prayer in order to prepare ourselves to receive what we really need. We might want success or health or a speedy answer to what path we are to follow, but what we might really need is patience and wisdom.

I urge you, then, to be like the widow in today's parable: having an attitude of living in God's presence so intensely and in such an intimate manner that you can badger him with your prayers. Listen to him and speak frequently with him. If we pray and orient our lives towards the coming of God's Kingdom, we can be assured that he will take care of our daily concerns.

### ***Conclusion***

The point is abundantly clear. Almighty God does listen; he is listening. He wants us to pray – to pray always and never lose heart. Why? Not because he doesn't know what we need, but so that the more we ask something of him, the more the desire for what is for our good will grow in our hearts and souls. And receiving that good from him, the more grateful we will be – the more willing we will be to offer him thanksgiving, worship, and adoration.

And that is what we are now doing in the Eucharist, that greatest prayer of all, a prayer so full of promise and hope that it brings Jesus

into our midst and into our hearts. Yes, the Church is praying always; everywhere at every hour around the world she offers this great prayer of praise and thanksgiving. By participating in this prayer with the angels and saints we are truly praying “always” and are strengthened never “to lose heart.”

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver