

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time – October 16, 2022

- Today's readings encompass several powerful images that stick in our minds:
 - Moses' arms rising and falling as a battle swings back and forth between the contending armies;
 - the stern judge who has no fear of God;
 - the persistent widow repeatedly petitioning the judge.
- How exactly do these images relate to us? What meaning do their stories have for us?
- What connects them are relationships between a powerful being and someone who seeks their help:
 - Moses and the Israelites seek God's help to defeat their enemy, Amalek;
 - the widow seeks justice from the judge.
- Widows in Jesus's time were among the most vulnerable in society. They were excluded from inheritance under Hebrew laws and otherwise mistreated, despite the protestations of the prophets Isaiah (10:2) and Malachi (3:5).
- The judge was at the opposite end of the power spectrum. He (and the judge was undoubtedly a "he") had the power to grant or deny justice – to compel people to do right, or not. He was also fearless (even to the point of not fearing God) and respected no one.
- How would you like your fate to be in the hands of a judge like this? Although the characteristics attributed to him align with our notions of impartiality in the justice system, he seems to have taken them a bit too far.
- But Jesus, as in many of his parables, wanted to make a point in striking terms. And setting up the fearsome judge makes the widow's persistence all the more remarkable.
- Despite her weakness, she is not deterred in her repeated pleas for justice; in fact, she probably had nothing to lose, so why not keep bugging the judge until he relents? The worst he could do is deny her the justice she seeks.
- And so, the judge who fears no one grants the widow's request, mainly to stop her from bothering him. Her constant entreaties allow this powerless, vulnerable woman to obtain the justice she seeks.
- Luke says at the beginning of this Gospel reading that Jesus tells his disciples this parable to convey "their need to pray always and to not lose heart." Prayer is speaking to God as the widow spoke to the judge.
- It is a conversation of sorts, albeit one that often appears one-sided. The judge ignores the widow's pleas until one day he does not.

- Our prayers to God often seem to elicit no response, or at least not one we can discern. We need to keep our eyes and ears open for God’s response. And also be open to a response we do not expect.
- Jesus is telling his disciples (and us too) to pray like the widow – with constant hope, without losing heart.
- The first reading from Exodus also tells us something about prayer. Moses needs to keep his arms up to ensure the Israelites’ victory, but he cannot do it himself. He needs help.
- If we see his raised arms as a form of prayer, this story says something about the importance of shared prayer, the prayer we say at Mass together as a community, the prayers we say when someone else asks for our prayers, or we offer prayers, for their recovery from a serious illness or in consolation for the death of someone close to them.
- Sharing prayer not only amplifies prayer, it also provides support for those who are the object of our prayers. Knowing someone is praying for you provides comfort and boosts hope that you will obtain what you are praying for.
- When I shared my reflections last year on this 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, I spoke of the challenges we face as a faith community, challenges most clearly demonstrated by the church’s treatment of Indigenous peoples and the need for reconciliation.
- If there is something that needs our prayers, this is it. But it also needs action. I spoke of the Pope’s convocation of a Synod, a “journeying together” to discern who we are as a faith community and how we should move forward.
- This journeying has begun in our parish through the meetings held earlier this year and the report our parish has submitted based on these meetings.
- And the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has established an Indigenous Reconciliation Fund. Its goal is to support meaningful reconciliation work as determined by local Indigenous groups and organizations.
- The Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall has committed to raising \$1.2M for this fund, which will be used to support
 - healing and reconciliation for communities and families,
 - culture and language revitalization,
 - education and community building.
- Our prayers for Indigenous reconciliation are prayers for justice, like those of the widow in today’s Gospel.

- The claims of Indigenous peoples for justice are encompassed in this parable. For hundreds of years, they have been denied justice in very many ways. Yet, Indigenous people have continued to seek justice like the widow. Should we not support them in their pursuit of justice?
- Like Aaron and Hur in the first reading, we need to support them as they supported the arms of Moses. This Sunday, let us pray for continued progress on reconciliation and commit to support our prayers with concrete action.

JMK