

Sermon: Insist, do not give up

Luke 18:1-8

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This is not a political campaign, but in preparing my sermon I thought of a story I read about Donald Trump. One piano-company, Freedhold Music Center, had delivered 100.000\$ worth of pianos to one of the casinos of Trump, called the Taj Mahal.

After having delivered the pianos, the owner, Michael Diehl, never got his money, he waited many months. Eventually the casino told him that they had financial problems and that he could take 70.000\$ or get nothing.

Of course Diehl had no option - for the difference of 30.000\$ he could not start a court case against the casino. A court case would take much money and a long time. So he accepted his loss and agreed to take the 70.000\$ - far under the agreed price of 100.000.

Why I thought of this story?

1 The story

Jesus told a story about the unjust systems of our world, where the rich tend to win and the poor tend to lose.

Jesus tell the story of a widow who pleads her case with a judge, to explain that we must pray much and not lose heart.

In the story that Jesus tells, there are two personalities. A judge, who did not fear God and who did not respect humankind. This means, he was dishonest and he was not bothered much by truth.

Every village in Israel, at the time of the Jesus, had a sort of police-officials who had to maintain law and order. The Jewish Talmud speaks in very negative terms of these "village judges" and accuses them of ignorance, arbitrariness and greed.

Unless a plaintiff had influence and money to bribe his way to a verdict he had no hope of ever getting his case settled in his advantage. These judges were said to pervert justice for a dish of meat.

That is the sort of judge the parables speaks about. The audience of Jesus immediately smiled - they understood the situation he described and they all despised these totally biased judges. Biased in the advantage of the rich and famous.

If a plate of meat is enough to bribe a judge it is clear that the rich always win and the poor always lose. The poor in those days, like in Egypt, cannot afford a plate of meat.

So this poor widow, the other person in the story, stands no chance. But she insisted. "Give me justice against my adversary". The woman kept bothering the judge.

A couple of years ago, in Germany and The Netherlands, some clever people thought of a good way to force companies to pay their debts. As you may know, for large companies it is very easy to ignore their small creditors.

Big companies can decide just not pay, because these small creditors do not have the finances not the time to start court cases.

So what some small creditors did, was to hire people in the suits of gravediggers, dressed in black, to just stand in front of the companies that owed them money.

After a few days so many people were talking about this, and the media paid attention to it, that those large companies were suddenly very quick to pay their debts. They did not mind to be immoral and to not pay their debts, but they could not stand the media to talk bad about them.

So the small creditors did get their money after all.

This is a bit like the approach of the widow in the story of Jesus. She went day after day to the judge, so that in the end he gave in.

"Because the widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down with her continual coming."

The widow was the symbol of all who were poor and defenseless. It was obvious that she, without resource of any kind, had no hope of ever extracting justice from such a judge. But she had one weapon—persistence. And she got justice.

2 The application

We also need justice. I hope you forgive me for saying it, but I guess we are all like those small people who are taken for a ride by companies and by law. We suffer from much injustice, either done to us by other people, by companies we deal with, by customers, by colleagues, by governments.

And even our universe seems to mete out injustice to us. For no moral reason, we become sick. We suffer many problems.

We need God to act as a righteous judge, and to help us.

And what Jesus is telling us, is that if even an unjust judge in Israel ends up doing justice to the person who keeps on pleading her case, how much more will God, who is infinitely just, and who is our Father...

...how much more will God listen to the persevering prayer of his children. God, in other words, gives justice to his elect if they persist in seeking his help.

The parable does not compare God with an unjust judge; it rather contrasts Him to such a bad judge.

God does respect humankind; he is just; he does do justice; he is a loving Father; he listens to all who pray to him; he gives free access to all who need him. You can go to him any time.

God's justice and his goodness also puts the insistent prayers in another light.

The poor widow had to beg, to scream, to go on and on, hoping that in the end the unjust magistrate would do her justice - just because he wanted to get rid of her.

With God, we know that because he is good and he is just, and that he will do justice in the end. He will make all things well. we await his goodness for us.

Surely, we should not expect to get whatever we pray for. Often a father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks would hurt rather than help. God is like that.

We do not know what is to happen in the next hour, let alone the next week, or month, or year. Only God sees time whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run.

But as God always does what is best for us, and as he does justice in the end, because He is such a judge, we approach him all the time in prayer.

We do not need to convince God by our insistent prayers. We do not need to show him how earnest we are. We cannot bribe him to give us what we want by making promises, or by being good or by praying much.

God will in the end do justice to us because we are his children through Jesus Christ.

God is good, and He will, in the end, give his children what is best. Just as you give your children what is best - even if they misbehave.

Wise parents do not give their children what they want, especially not when they are nagging on and on...

Whether our kids ask us or ask us not, we give them the best, don't we? We pray much not to make God give, we pray much because we know he will give. We pray not to convince him but to thank him.

God does not need our nagging. Jesus actually makes very clear that God does not answer our prayers because of our multitude of words. He answers our prayers because of his goodness and because through Jesus Christ we belong to him.

So be assured, because even an unjust judge will give those who ask what they need, the righteous judge, God our Father, will certainly do justice to us.

3 What to do

So what to do? Because God's character is good, and because he will give us what we need, we must always pray and not lose heart.

In our present circumstances, we must not lose heart. It is so easy to be discouraged if we look at the reality around us. Life seems an ongoing road filled with stumbling blocks.

If we have solved one problem the next one is ahead of us.

We are like a poor widow in an unjust world.

But as God, the judge, is also our Father, we must not be discouraged. He will give "justice to his elect who cry to him day and night." So be encouraged. God is on your side.

Mind you, let me underline it once more, it is not because we cry to him day and night that he does justice to us. Crying to him day and night it simply what marks his children.

Prayer is our recognition of our limitation and our dependence: we come from God, we belong to God and we return to God! We cannot, therefore, but abandon ourselves to him, our Creator and Lord, with full and complete confidence.

Prayer, therefore, is first of all a dialogue of confidence and love.

We pray on and on, not in order to change God's mind; we do it because he is our Father. Because he is good Father. Children never stop talking to their parents, if the parents are any good. So we cry to him day and nights.

Well, not automatically, and this is exactly why Jesus tells us this parable. He encourages us to pray and not lose heart. Because it is easy to not pray and to lose heart. It is easy to lose faith. That is why Jesus asks, "When the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Because we are people of faith and hope, we should not stop praying. And prayer, in its turn, strengthens our faith.

Faith and prayer go hand in hand. St Augustine said,, "In order to pray, let us believe; and for our faith not to weaken, let us pray. Faith causes prayer to grow, and when prayer grows our faith is strengthened" (Sermon, 115).

As Christians we are disciples of Jesus. His life was a continual prayer, a continual act of worship and love of the Father.

The summit of Jesus' prayer is the Sacrifice of the Cross, handed down to us by means of the Holy Eucharist.

The Holy Eucharist is the best prayer of the church as it draws our hearts and minds to Jesus Christ and as he himself is present there to give himself to us.

We pray with him, to him, through him, and he prays in us and with us and for us.

The Christian prays in Jesus Christ: Christ is our prayer!

And we need him to lead us in prayer and to pray with us, because of our natural frailty and guilt. That is why we pray humbly and realistically, recognizing that we are poor creatures, confused in ideas, tempted by evil, frail and weak, in continual need of inner strength and consolation.

Prayer gives the strength for great ideals, to maintain faith, love, generosity. Prayer gives the courage to emerge from indifference and guilt, if we have unfortunately yielded to temptation and weakness.

Prayer gives light to see and consider the events of one's own life and of history in the saving perspective of God and eternity.

Conclusion

Therefore, do not stop praying! Let not a day pass without your having prayed a little!

Prayer is our duty, and our joy, because it is a dialogue with God through Jesus Christ! Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer. It is good to pray that often. One of the earliest documents of the church, the Didache, says that Christians should pray it three times a day. If you find it hard to pray, start with the Lord's prayer, morning, afternoon and evening.

Pray much and do not lose heart; God your Father is with you and will do justice in the end.

Amen