

Dear saints gathered and given their justice, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. Jesus tells us what the parable means, and good thing, or we might have missed the point altogether. We have the crooked judge who neither fears God nor men and the pesky widow who keeps showing up in his courtroom demanding justice. While the crooked judge could care less about justice, he will give this woman her justice for no other reason than she is grinding him down.

God is not an unrighteous judge but the Righteous One whose judgments are pure and precise. If a crooked and unrighteous judge can be persuaded by the persistent petitions of a woman seeking justice, how much more will the Righteous Judge work for His elect who cry over him day and night? Will he delay long over them? No, of course not! He will deliver justice to them and do it quickly. Jesus gives his word on it.

Dear children of God, persistent prayer flows from faith, it is an exercise of faith, trust in God's promise. Thus our reading ends with the big question, when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth? It can be difficult for us to persistently and patiently pray. We often times lose heart and pray, especially in our have it your way mentality, its now or never. We hate standing in lines, being stuck in traffic, waiting on slow internet connections, or even waiting to get out the door as we file out of the sanctuary.

And so often times it is with our prayers. With the many myths and thoughts behind prayer, often times one even wonders if prayer does anything at all. If you ask the psychologist, for some it benefits for others it doesn't, but that benefit is merely a relaxed state of mind. To others prayer seems to be like that of using God as a vending machine, put in a dollar and get a 75 cent candy bar. Many Christians even think this way, pray hard enough and you will get what you desire. If you don't get it, then pray harder and perhaps the next go around God will give you what you desire.

With varying thoughts and voices chiming in on the subject, it is not surprising that we often times find ourselves disillusioned with prayer. We pray half-heartedly or distractedly. We neglect to offer God thanksgiving at our meals. In fact, we rarely pray except when something is going wrong, and when stressful times continue to plague us we wonder if God really answers prayer and in the end we neglect prayer.

Dr. Luther writes, "We must understand that God is not joking, but that he will be angry and punish us if we do not pray, just as he punishes all other kinds of disobedience." (Large Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 18) Luther's words accuse us today just as much as when he first penned them. Luther explains what Christ proclaims here in the parable when he says that we are to "drum into [God's] ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith (LC, 441, p2) This was Luther's way of saying what Christ said at the beginning of today's Gospel, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."

As the Psalmist proclaims, “evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.” (Psalm 55:17) Prayer is a continual engaging with God, not a passive thing, not something that merely gets done on the side. Rather, this is a struggle, a contention with the Lord. The life of prayer is like Jacob wrestling with God in the wilderness. Jacob pins God down and won’t let him go, even with his hip out of joint, until he receives a blessing. That’s the stubborn persistence of faith. The new name he receives is Israel, one who wrestles with God. That’s what the Church is, what baptized believers are, God’s Israel, ones who wrestle with God in prayer.

The widow was persistent, struggling with the judge for her justice. Here was a woman, about as low on the totem pole as one could go and she persists that the judge gives her justification against those that stand against her. Not that she deserved it, but it is what she asks for. And the judge, who neither fears God nor respects man, is not concerned with her but that she will beat him down, literally to give him a black eye. The judge, while not fearing God nor respecting man was concerned about his good name, his standing before others. So he gives her justification, he gives her righteousness. Her persistent prayers did not merit what she received, Jacob’s blessing was not given for wrestling hard enough, but they are given as an answer to a request made in faith.

Often times people get caught up in the form and substance of prayer. We even get scared to pray, fearing it is not the right thing to pray for. Jesus simply gives to us the gift of prayer. We pray “Thy will be done,” knowing that if it is not the Father’s will, the answer will be “no.” Christ did not seek abundant prayers for the sake of praying, otherwise monasticism would have redeemed the entire world by now. Christ did not seek long-winded prayers otherwise the Pharisees would have erased the need for a Savior. Christ did not seek prayers for relaxation, otherwise all we would need is psychology or Transcendental Meditation. Christ sought instead the prayers growing from faith. Christ sought the prayers of those who understand their failure to withstand the temptations and attacks of Satan. Christ sought prayers of those who pleaded for redemption from sin, renewal in the Lord’s Supper and renewal in Baptism.

This prayer Christ has bound Himself too. He must answer in the affirmative. Whenever His people cry out to Him with prayer seeking forgiveness of sins, he responds with a resounding, “Yes. You are my people. I have redeemed you.”

God is not unrighteous or reluctant. If the unrighteous judge granted the woman justice against her adversary, even though he cared nothing for her or her problems, how much more does Christ, our judge, grant us the redemption we need? Will not Christ, who suffered unjustly on our behalf, grant us the fruit of His sufferings? Christ was judged by sinful humans who had no right to judge him. He hung from a cross He did not deserve to redeem those who unjustly sacrificed him.

From this tree God wreaked vengeance on all sins and transgressions of mankind. God wreaked his vengeance on Satan. God gave justice to Christ who suffered the greatest injustice. From this place, God made Christ the judge of all mankind. Will not this judge “give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?” (Luke 18:7)

He has and he will continue to do so. The delay that this judge takes is not a delay but forbearance. This judge could decide to give justice right here and now for all the sins we have committed. He could have sentenced you to eternal damnation from the moment of your conception. Yet His forbearance moved Him to delay in order that you might be brought to faith in Him and from this faith to accomplish the works He has set before you.

And so we are in a sense, the widow, who approaches the judge imploring him to grant her remission, to grant her justice against her adversary. And so, you and I, the widow pray "deliver us from the evil one," that we may not lose heart.

Our prayer does not fit into the categories of science. Our prayers do not always have tangible results. For science, this doesn't work; according to science, you must be able to duplicate the experiment in order to prove it works. Our prayers consist of more than a psychological relaxation and reorganization of the brain to face the challenges of the day.

No, our prayers are fervent pleas to the creator of the heavens and the earth. They are pleas to deliver us from the attacks of our adversary Satan and to redeem us from our transgressions. God is also aware of our physical circumstances, and is concerned with them. Satan often uses our physical circumstances as means by which to turn us from God. So we also pray for our physical well being, for daily bread. And while our primary need is reconciliation with the Father, we also pray for strength to endure the struggles and hardships incorporated in our daily lives.

Jacob called the place where he wrestled with God "Peniel," the "face of God." "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." Peniel, the Jesus place, where you encounter God in the flesh of His Son, here to baptize Alex, where he baptized you, here to forgive you, here to give you His Body and Blood. Here God's face shines upon you give you His peace. You, the widow, God's Israel are brought together and receive the justice given by Christ, made righteous, given faith in Jesus that is forged and fed by His Word and Spirit. And where faith is forged and fed, there is always persistent, patient prayer.