

October 16

Today's readings are mainly about prayer — perseverance in prayer, constancy in prayer and trust in God as we pray. They are also about the Trustworthiness and Justice of God, the type of Justice that reaches out to the poor and the weak, enabling them to fight against injustice.

Scripture lessons summarized: In the first reading, Moses, after sending Joshua to fight against Amalek, is presented as making tireless intercession with constancy for the victory of Israel's army. Both Moses and the widow in today's Gospel story teach us how we should pray with trusting Faith and perseverance. In the second reading, St. Paul instructs Timothy to persevere in his ministry, to proclaim the word of God with persistence in all circumstances, and to use it to "correct, reprove and appeal with patience."

By introducing the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow in today's Gospel, Jesus emphasizes the "necessity of praying always and not losing heart." Constancy in prayer is Faith in action. Jesus presents the widow in today's Gospel as a model of the trust and tenacity with which his disciples are to pray. The widow was asking for something which God would certainly want for her – justice.

When Luke wrote this Gospel, the Parousia or Second Coming of Jesus had been delayed beyond what the early Church had expected. In addition, the Church was experiencing persecution from both the Jews and the Romans. The persecuted early Christians were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their Faith. Hence, today's Gospel lesson addresses the issues of Faith in difficult times. It reassures the disciples that God is listening to their persistent prayers and will grant them justice and vindicate their Faith in the end. The Gospel today seems to be a classic example of the link between perseverance and blessing. Luke sets the story in the context of a challenge Jesus makes to his disciples to pray always and not lose heart, that is, to persevere in prayer and receive God's blessings.

This parable is based on the corrupt Roman legal practices prevalent in Palestine at the time of Jesus. We hope that the judge in the parable was not a Jewish judge. It may be one of the paid magistrates appointed either by Herod or by the Romans, for they, like the judge in the parable, were notorious for being so avaricious, corrupt, and without fear of God or the public that people called them robber judges. Further, although the Hebrew Scriptures demand protection for

widows, orphans, and aliens, widows were not included in Hebrew laws on inheritance, and they became common symbols of the exploited and the oppressed. The widow in Jesus' parable is the symbol of all who are poor, defenseless, without hope of ever obtaining justice, against a rich, crooked, influential opponent.

But the widow in Jesus' parable has one powerful weapon—a dogged persistence which allows the judge no peace. The theme of “persistent prayer” needs to be understood not as “hassling” God, but rather as a consequence of a strong Faith that believes God hears prayers and will indeed answer them in His own time. So the underlying theme is really our need to have Faith in all circumstances, good or adverse. Hence, this parable is not only about the efficacy of persistent prayer, but also about the character of God, His Trustworthiness and Justice, a type of Justice that reaches out to the poor and the weak, enabling them to fight against injustice.

We need to combine formal prayers with action prayer: It is ideal that we start our prayers by reading from the Bible, especially the Psalms and the Gospels. Formal, memorized and liturgical prayers are also essential for the Christian prayer life. Personal prayer is of great importance in our life of prayer. Talking to God in our own words — praising Him, thanking Him and presenting our needs before Him — transforms our whole life into prayer. We should perfect our prayers by bringing ourselves into God's presence during our work several times during the day and by offering to God all that we are, all that we have, and all that we do. Along with formal and memorized prayers, this type of prayer life enables us to pray always and pray with constancy and trusting perseverance.

We should not expect to get whatever we pray for. This parable does not suggest that God writes a blank check, guaranteeing whatever we want, whenever we want, in the form we ask for. But we conveniently forget the fact that, often, a loving father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks would hurt rather than help him (e.g., a sharp knife). God is like that. He knows what to give, when to give and how to give it. Only God sees time whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus said that we must never be discouraged in prayer. Instead, we have to leave

the answer to God's decision saying, "Thy will be done." Sincere and persistent prayer makes us ready to accept His will.