

Prayer is a central concern in the Books of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles. In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells a parable about a persistent woman who harasses an unjust judge until he finally gives in and gives her the just judgment she demands. Jesus seeks to remind us how we ought to "pray always and not lose heart."

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' " And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Reflections

Showing Up

I struggle most in my life when things are not going the way that I want or expect them to, and "I don't know what to do about it." Imagine that. If the quality of my prayer life (and my faith at that moment) were revealed by, say, the state of my desk, the gnawed pencils would speak volumes: desktop missing under an autumnal layer of irrelevant documents; and, several nearly empty coffee cups from two days ago. While dueling with a problem, my internal life is a small, desperate office clerk running up and down narrow aisles in a cathedral of filing cabinets, ripping folders from drawers he can barely reach in search of that one document that so plainly states the answer. I'm coming to God in what I fervently believe is faithful prayer, but I'm stuck. I worry and gnaw on the problem in prayer over and over, and I'm not doing much else.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells about the widow who keeps returning to a godless judge with her plea for justice which the exasperated

judge finally grants to be rid of her. I imagine the widow coming back to her home each day where she kneels and asks God for help. Then, she returns to court the next morning to do her part. She exhibits faith, she shows up to do what she can do, and she obtains what she seeks. Though I pray for God's help, I must show up to do what is mine to do.

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Taking action is usually my stumbling point. Through prayer, I find that there are usually two types of actions I should take: 1) do something I don't want to do; 2) do nothing. I'm often called to take one type of action when I would much rather do the other. Trust me. Doing nothing sounds really

good to me when through prayer I realize I should confront someone about something difficult. And how many times when I felt compelled to act, have I chafed at the sense that God's will for me is to do nothing? I have learned I need to pray for knowledge of God's will for me and for the willingness to carry it out.

Unfortunately, pain is frequently the best motivator for me. Several years ago, a family crisis brought me to God in anguished prayer for months. Finally, with no relief in human sight, I asked God, "Whatever the outcome, just show me what to do and help me do it." I realized that anxious prayer had become my refuge, my way of "doing" something without confronting what I needed to do. Soon, direction emerged. Or, more likely, I was more open to seeing the direction. I gritted my teeth and did my part. It wasn't painless or quick, but family life improved. Showing up still isn't easy for me, but I'm working on it. Maybe my office clerk can retire soon.

— Sylvia Karman

Readings

Sunday, September 16

Luke 18:1-8

What is your most urgent plea to God right now? Do you know yet what God's will is for you regarding this request?

Monday, September 17

Psalm 4

While wavering loyalty grieves David (verse 2), what counsel does he give those who feel they have been betrayed and are angry? What does David pray for? How is that to "search your hearts and be silent" brings the peace he asks for?

Tuesday, September 18

Romans 8:18-27

What "present sufferings" are you struggling with? What are you asking God in your prayers? What does this passage tell us about faith and Christian hope? How does true faith differ from wishful thinking? How have your prayers and actions been informed by faith?

Wednesday, September 19

Isaiah 38:4-8

Hezekiah's prayers for recovery were answered. Discuss the last time you recall that God answered your prayers. Were your prayers answered when and how you anticipated? What had been God's will for you?

Thursday, September 20

Jeremiah 10:23-25

When has God's direction for you seemed difficult or harsh? Discuss how those trials affected your faith?

Friday, September 21

Luke 14:25-33

What has discipleship required of you? When you have gone to God in prayer, what have you discerned you must do when you least expected or desired it? How did the events help or change you?

Saturday, September 22

James 5:13-16

As disciples of Christ, James reminds us to "confess" to each other and pray. How does being honest with yourself and others empower your prayer life?

Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.