

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

October 19, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Exodus 17:8-13 (God's help depends on Moses' constant prayer.)

Responsory: Psalm 121 (Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.)

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2 (Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed.)

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8 (Parable of the dishonest judge.)

This certainly is not the first time that we've heard Jesus urge his disciples to pray persistently. We all remember his famous teaching: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you." But, if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that many of our prayers may go unanswered because of our inability to *discern what is best* before making our requests.

In today's gospel, however, discernment of what is best doesn't seem to be an issue, because Jesus is speaking specifically about asking for *justice*. He contrasts our just and loving God with the judge in the parable, who "neither feared God nor respected any human being." As a judge, he's supposed to render a just verdict in every matter that is brought before him. That's his job! Furthermore, he's supposed to act *promptly*, so as to limit the harm suffered by innocent victims. But this judge doesn't care about protecting the innocent or ruling according to God's commandments. So, the poor widow, who is alone and vulnerable, has no choice but to pester him relentlessly. Note, she's not asking for any *favours* to which she's not entitled; she's simply demanding a *just decision* against her adversary.

Jesus assures us that, *unlike* the judge in the parable, God is a *just and loving judge*, who cares deeply about the welfare of his people. So, he will not only "secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night," but he will also, "see to it that justice is done for them *speedily*." That sounds very reassuring, and it fits with our understanding of God and his care for his people. It all sounds great, until we check the latest news headlines and are reminded once again that many people who seek justice *never receive it*, and many people who act unjustly are *never held accountable* for their crimes. Our lived experience seems to be at odds not only with Jesus' promise, but also with our own beliefs about God's goodness and faithfulness. In fact, there even seems to be a blatant contradiction *within Jesus' teaching*. If the Lord responds "speedily" to the pleas of his people, why would they need to "call out to him day and night"? The fact that people are calling out for justice so persistently, like the widow in the parable, suggests that God is *not responding* speedily to their cries. Rather, he seems to be acting like the dishonest judge in the parable, ignoring the suffering of his people and frustrating their desire for justice.

Many of us have been struggling with this very problem in recent months, as we have witnessed countless examples of gross injustice perpetrated by our own federal government. Whatever your views about illegal immigration, all of us should be deeply disturbed by images of masked and heavily armed ICE agents brutalizing unarmed civilians in our streets. In a nation where the First Amendment to our Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of

assembly, we should also be deeply disturbed to see federal agents firing tear gas, rubber bullets and pepper balls at journalists and peaceful protesters, including a Protestant Minister in Chicago who was standing with hands upraised in prayer when he was shot in the face and torso with no fewer than seven pepper balls.

I find myself at a loss for words when people come to me for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and they confess that they are very angry about everything that's happening. They want to be good Christians. They don't want to have ill will toward anyone. But they can't help wishing that some kind of harm would come to the people who do such awful things to their fellow man, and to the leaders who are orchestrating the violence for their own political ends. I'm afraid I don't have an easy answer for them. However, I think it's important for us to recognize that much of our anger is really directed at *God* for allowing the injustice to continue unabated. We're *all* that poor widow crying out for justice and wondering when the judge is going to listen and respond.

It might help to consider the example of persistent prayer that we find in today's first reading. Moses must keep his arms lifted up in *constant* prayer throughout the battle against the Amalekites. He cannot rest while the Israelites are having the better of the fight, for as soon as he lowers his arms, the battle turns in the enemies' favor once again. When he grows too weary, he needs attendants to support his drooping arms. That scene is a fitting metaphor for our life of faith. We can think of ourselves as being in a *lifelong* battle, or at least a lifelong *struggle*, which requires constant prayer on our part. At times, we grow weary, wondering if God is listening, or doubting that our prayer is effective. Sometimes we need the support of other people of faith, to give us strength when we are weak or to remind us of our *constant* need for God's help and protection, even when the "battle" seems to be going in our favor.

Frankly, I think it's easier to cry out for *help* when the battle seems to be turning against us personally, that is, when our own wellbeing is in some kind of jeopardy. Our anguished cries often *increase* in intensity when we cry out for *justice*, because it seems that God's enemies are prevailing over his righteous ones. That's when we ask in frustration, "Lord, why aren't you doing something to stop this?" But notice how Jesus turns the tables on us at the very end of today's gospel, when he asks rhetorically, "When the Son of Man comes, *will he find faith on the earth?*" Will he find people praying persistently, trusting that God sees and cares deeply about the suffering of his people, and aware of their constant need for God's help in good times and bad? Will he find people who understand that our covenant with God demands fidelity *on our part*, even as we demand that God be faithful to *his* promises?

Perhaps the faith that Jesus hopes to find upon his return in glory is faith that *God knows what he is doing*. It would be quite sad for the Lord to show up and find all of us grumbling about the awful state of the world and accusing God of not listening to our pleas for justice. He might justifiably reprimand us for our lack of faith and remind us that our job is not to tell God what to do, but to *trust* in his judgment, *discern* his will, and *keep praying* without losing heart.