

"FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

29th SUNDAY -C-

OCTOBER 19, 2025

Exodus 17: 8-13; Psalm 121;

2 Timothy 3: 14- 4:2; Luke 18: 1-18

By: *Jude Siciliano*, OP



Dear Preachers:

We preachers need to be wary of today's parable of the widow and the unjust judge, lest we convey a false image of God. (Remember the command, "Thou shall not have strange gods before me.") Well, if we are not careful, we are liable to preach a "strange god" and even seem to make what we say sound legitimate or backed up by this parable.

The trap lies in our modern tendency to be too literal. By that I mean, we tend to miss the imaginative aspects of these parables and apply a strict formula to them in our interpretation. It goes something like this: the judge is God, and we are the widows. So, like the widow we need to pray incessantly if we want to get what we want from God. Keep at it, God will eventually give in...isn't that what the parable seems to imply? This, or similar ways of interpreting parables, treats them as allegories – not parables. Look what such an interpretation does to our faith: it paints God as hard hearted and our constant prayer like water dripping on the stone heart of a reluctant God, hoping to eventually wear God down on our behalf. Remember too that the judge in the parable is unjust – making it even more dangerous to allegorize this parable, lest God take on the features of this judge in our hearers' imaginations.

If God gets so misrepresented then we, who are praying earnestly and even desperately for something, are made to feel doubly alone, with no one on our side against the Almighty and seeming reluctant God. If this is what we convey, no matter how unintentionally, then we will have preached a "strange god" indeed! Certainly not the God of Jesus' words and actions. This false image will only reinforce an old stereotype of a God so offended by our sin, that God would punish us severely were it not for Jesus, God's beloved child who, by his faithfulness and sacrifice, stays God's angry hand. This makes God sound schizophrenic – partially with us in Jesus but ill-disposed as our Creator – with the Holy Spirit going back and forth between us humans and the two trying to tie up the loose ends.

Even if we didn't have the citation telling us that this is a parable from Luke's gospel, we could easily guess its authorship. The parable has the signs of a Lucan tale for again we hear his often-repeated themes about the poor, women and prayer. Widows were an especially vulnerable group in biblical times and in the scriptures we often hear the reference to "widows and orphans" – two particularly vulnerable groups. A widow would be dependent on her sons, or a close male relative to take care of her. She was especially vulnerable if the responsible males were indifferent to her welfare or worse, had defrauded her. In such situations a widow would have recourse to a judge who was supposed to protect the rights of widows and the poor. But the judge to whom our widow turns has no regard for her plight and "neither feared God nor

respected any human being." What chance would she have against a judge like this who disregards the basic commandments about God and neighbor? The cards are stacked against her, and things look pretty grim for her ever getting her due.

But this is no ordinary widow! She confronts the judge using the only things she has on her side – her voice and her persistence. What she wants is justice, but from a judge who is not in the least bit interested in giving it to her; the only recourse she would normally have had is not interested in her just cause. But by her persistence she wears down the judge who finally gives in to her. Don't you find it amusing to hear the judge's fear that a widow is going to come and "strike" him? The original language suggests that he is afraid she will give him a black eye. I hear Jesus' listeners, so often denied their own rights before the rich and powerful, chuckling as Jesus paints this picture of a "dangerous" widow who will give a good boxing to a corrupt male judge.

The widow's plight calls to mind those who are deprived of justice in our own society. As next year's elections draw near whose voices are going to be heard by both politicians and voters in November? Whose interests will be at the top of the list? Will the voices of the poor and powerless be shouted out by individuals and special interest groups who have more financial or voting power? It would be a rare election indeed if this didn't happen. Most often the poor, minorities, immigrants, homeless, infirmed, aged and very young are not first on the minds of those running for office, or those casting votes. We can hear the widow's voice in another way, for now she is speaking for those in our society who are not heard – despite their just and desperate need. Will her voice be heard today by city planners deciding where to put a new power plant, city dump, Petro-chemical plant, refinery? Who will influence municipal and federal governments when decisions are being made about which homes will be destroyed to build a super highway? Picture the widow standing among those disenfranchised and hear her voice, "Render a just decision for [us] against [our] adversary."

This is one of those "how-much-more parables." Jesus paints a picture of a despicable judge who eventually gives in to the persistent demands of the widow. It is as if he is saying, "If this kind of a person eventually responds, how much more will God?" Why? Because God is not turned against us and will "secure the rights" of God's chosen. Of course, our struggle lies in the fact that so much in our world is unjust, especially for the disenfranchised. We pray for things to be put right and even pray that we can help make them so. Yet often, conditions don't improve, sometimes they even get worse. Doesn't that make you want to despair of ever seeing things righted? So, we are tempted to cease our works and quite our prayers. "What's the use?", we lament. Even when things improve a bit there still is an enormous mountain of wrongs to address – in our homes, church, community and world. We feel our efforts are so puny and so are tempted to withdraw back into our private world saying, "What difference can I make?"

Such feelings tempt us to quit our efforts at prayer and works on behalf of God's reign. Jesus expresses how serious the issues are, how powerful the forces against us are and seems to worry about the effects on his disciples. He asks, "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Not an idle or speculative question, but one that is based on the experiences of the

church from its beginnings: disciples have hard work and prayer to do until the Lord returns and the wait, without immediate signs of "success," can disillusion us and threaten our faith.

If we are looking for an image of the divine in this parable and don't find it in the judge, is there another possibility? Here is another approach by the New Testament scholar Barbara Reid. (PARABLES FOR PREACHERS: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, YEAR C. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000.) She suggests finding the God-like figure in the widow who persistently pursues injustice, denouncing it until justice is achieved. This interpretation is consistent with the New Testament message that power is found in weakness. A conclusion we would draw for ourselves then is that if this is the God in whose image we are made, then we too should tirelessly pursue justice even if it is against more powerful forces than we can muster.

I like the first reading's image for prayer. As powerful and exemplary a model of faith Moses was during hard times, nevertheless, as the battle against Amalek wears on, Moses' raised hands "grew tired." We can identify with that fatigue, we who find it hard to keep our hands raised in prayer as life tries to wear us down. Even Moses needed help. So, Aaron and Hur support his hands, "one on one side and one on the other, so his hands remained steady till sunset." We all need help in our struggles against evil forces and in our desire to stay faithful in hard times.

Look around at those who worship with us at this Eucharist. We see the elderly, even infirmed, here—still praying. We know of those who can't get out of bed to come to church, but we also know they are praying and staying faithful. They give strength and determination to our faltering prayer; they help keep our hands "raised." Perhaps someone notices us here at worship. We don't think of ourselves as great models of faith, but who knows what straggling soul at prayer with us is helped by seeing us here? We may be helping them keep their faltering and tired hands "raised" in hope and prayer.

Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/101925.cfm>

QUOTABLE

On Silence

The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation, and so any sort of haste that hinders recollection must clearly be avoided. During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, accommodated to the gathered assembly, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the first and second reading, and lastly at the conclusion of the homily.⁶⁰

---#56, from the GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003.

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD



All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16-17

I grew up at a time when the Catholic Church discouraged its followers from studying the Bible. I can remember nuns telling students that it would just confuse us. Imagine my surprise many years later, when I opened my Bible one day and the words I read seemed to be talking directly to me in my innermost being. This brings me to another set of writings that has impacted my life, the social teachings of the Church. Catholic social teachings are essential elements of our faith. Its roots are in the Hebrew prophets who announced God's special love for the poor and called God's people to a covenant of love and justice. They are teachings founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ, who came "to bring glad tidings to the poor" (Luke 4:18), Are you familiar with papal documents on social justice going all the way back to 1891? Here are some of their blockbuster titles:

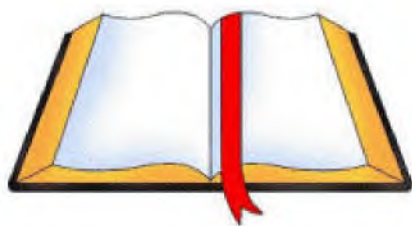
- ✠ **-Rerum Novarum** (On the Condition of Labor) 1891, Pope Leo XIII
- ✠ **-Quadragesimo Anno** (On the Reconstruction of the Social Order) 1931, Pope Pius XI
- ✠ **-Mater et Magistra** (Christianity and Social Progress) 1961, Pope John XXIII
- ✠ **-Pacem in Terris** (Peace on Earth) 1963, Pope John XXIII
- ✠ **-Populorum Progressio** (On the Development of Peoples) 1967, Pope Paul VI
- ✠ **-Laborem Exercens** (On Human Work) 1981, Pope John Paul II
- ✠ **-Caritas in Veritate** (Charity in Truth) 2009, Pope Benedict XVI
- ✠ **-Laudato Si'**: On Care for our Common Home 2015, Pope Francis

I can hear you now—I'd rather golf or anything else before I would read these dry texts. But the point is: they are not dry. They are about life, our life in the world and in relationship with others. There is one other writing that all the bishops of the world wrote in 1971 called *Justitia in Mundo* (Justice in the World). If we had enacted even a portion of what they itemized, we would be in a different place now. In their words, "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

Happy reading for a justice-filled life!

Barbara Molinari Quinby, MPS, Director
Office of Human Life, Dignity, and Justice Ministries
[Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral](#), Raleigh, NC

FAITH BOOK



Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run.

"Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Gospel reading:

The Lord said, "Will not God then
secure the rights of God's chosen ones
who call out to God day and night?"

Reflection:

The judge in today's parable cannot be taken as representing God, for he "neither feared God nor respected any human being." But can we see in the widow an image of our God?

She is a persistent voice for justice for the poor and those without voice in our society. Like our God, she will not stop her cry for justice until it is given.

So, we ask ourselves:

- What voice speaks a persistent message for justice in our parish? In our church? In our world?
- How do those voices affect your choices and actions?

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"One has to strongly affirm that condemnation to the death penalty is an inhuman measure that humiliates personal dignity, in whatever form it is carried out."

---Pope Francis

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- James Jaynes #0206197 (On death row since 6/4/1999)
- Andre Fletcher #0130628 (12/9/1999)
- Terry Hyatt #0199877 (2/7/2000)

---Central Prison P.O. 247 Phoenix, MD 2113

Please note: **Central Prison** is in Raleigh, NC., but for security purposes, mail to inmates is processed through a clearing house at the above address in Maryland.

For more information on the Catholic position on the death penalty go to the Catholic Mobilizing Network: <http://catholicsmobilizing.org/resources/cacp/>

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Fr. *Jude Siciliano*, OP
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 - b. [Click Here](#) to Sign Up.

2. ["VOLUME II"](#)

These reflections follow the Liturgical Calendar and appear here about mid-week each week. They are written by various guest authors.

If you would like to submit a reflection of your own, then [Click Here](#) to send it as a "Request to Post" to the Webmaster. Deadline is Monday of each week for the upcoming Sunday.

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