

# Reflections on Sunday's Readings: October 20, 2019

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time [C]

Exodus 17: 8-13

2 Timothy 3: 14-4: 2

Luke 18: 1-8



## *Do Not Lose Heart*

### **Introduction**

Our readings today encourage us to not lose heart, even if we see darkness or struggle around us personally or communally. We are invited to persist in our faith and in our trust in God as all good and as always present to us – nurturing us and empowering us.

### **Exodus Story**

We see this first in the story about the Amalekites attacking this very young community of liberated Hebrews. They are just getting on their way after fleeing Egypt. They have crossed the Red Sea and have faced a lack of water and then a lack of food. Then they experience the Amalekites attacking them as they cross the desert on their way to the land promised them by God.

The Amalekites were a nomadic people, and they were marauders. They attacked vulnerable peoples in the wastelands of the desert. Now they were setting upon this early community of Hebrews as they escaped Egypt. They were picking off the stragglers at first, and then they seem to attack the body of the community. The Amalekites seem to be out for themselves without seemingly a moral code. Moses decisively says 'We must defend ourselves as a community.' He calls Joshua to gather some men and go out to fight the Amalekites.

They battle the Amalekites, but this young community of faith needs the assurance that God is with them. They receive this assurance in Moses' prayers for them, and then they see further

that God and their community are with them through Aaron and Hur's support of Moses. They trust that the God who has freed them from slavery in Egypt is also with them in this struggle. The Hebrews decisively win this battle well aware of God being with them to accomplish this task in these dire straits. Their faith tells them that it is God's victory: God working through them in the battle.

### **Gospel Story**

Similarly in the Gospel story we have a woman, a widow, in dire straits. From the context of the story, she is likely pursuing some money matter. It may be about a debt owed to her, a pledge, or a portion of her inheritance that is being withheld from her; and she needs this to live on.

She persistently comes before this unjust judge who does not have any moral fiber in him. He does not care for God or for the people before him, and this is in direct contrast to the guidelines for judges in the Hebrew Scriptures where they are called to be especially mindful of widows, orphans, and aliens in their community. This is so because these are often the most vulnerable persons in the society of the times.

### **Some Key Aspects**

There are some important things to consider here in this story. One, this widow is a woman pleading her case in court for her rights. She is, in the Latin, a "mulier fortis," a strong woman who speaks her truth. She is speaking here in the "male club" of the court system of the time. It is also likely that this unjust judge is also corrupt. His decisions likely go to the one offering him the most money, and the widow's opponent may likely be bribing the judge to rule against her. And yet she keeps coming back to the judge and making work for him.

There is also a moment of comic relief in the parable, and I am sure Jesus offered his stories with these lighter moments too. Here we have this very powerful judge who has no regard for God or anyone else for that matter, and he is afraid of this persistent widow and her truth. He says "she will wear me down or give me a black eye." The word used in the story can mean both. This powerful judge is afraid of her taking a swing at him. She persists, and she wins her case and her rights. This is what Jesus is pointing to in the story. You have power in your truth and integrity, even though you are vulnerable and seemingly without standing, to bring change for yourself and others.

### **The Context of the Gospel Story**

The context of the story is most important for us to receive the full meaning of this story. At this point of Luke's Gospel, we know that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem with all that that will mean for him. He knows he is heading to a situation where he will give his life over to an unjust and corrupt system. He knows he will likely suffer cruelly and be killed, and he will do so non-violently. Jesus will walk this path with the peace that comes from knowing he is cherished and loved. This seems to be one of the points of this story here too. The widow persists in her cause non-violently, and she accomplishes what she hopes for, as Jesus hopes and trusts he will also.

Secondly, just before this parable, Jesus is speaking with the Pharisees and his disciples about the coming of the kingdom. When will this final day of setting things right be? This was very much a part of the Jewish community and of Jesus' society. The Jews believed that God would one day set things right and that a Messiah, an Anointed One, would bring this about. This is part of why people were so taken up with Jesus. Was he the one to bring God's kingdom in its fullness?

Now as Luke is writing his Gospel about 50 years after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection ... people in Luke's community of faith are asking "Why the delay?" Why hasn't the Day of the Lord come about? Why are we still caught up in a system that is unjust and corrupt?

### **Do Not Be Discouraged**

Jesus says to Luke's community and to us here: do not be discouraged if the Day of the Lord seems to be delayed. It will surely come! God is on the side of justice and healing, and God will bring this about. Keep your faith, do not lose heart! God is with you.

### **Conclusion**

One further thought here is to see these words of Jesus now in light of the evolutionary understanding we have of how God is at work in our world. The full healing of our world and of the human family may take a longer time than we might hope, but this is because God is bringing about this healing through us. God is working through us in our personal situations and in our communal development.

God is not delaying the Day of the Lord, but we now see that it may take longer because God is waiting on us to grow into a fuller maturity as persons and as a human family. God is not delaying the Day but is waiting on us. God is waiting on us to grow as a Church, to take full responsibility for the Earth, to grow toward fuller cooperation with one another and to give up wars and armaments, especially nuclear arms. God is at work but will not force us to grow and change. **God waits ...** hoping that we will join in with God's own dreams and plans for us.

So we cannot walk away from these responsibilities and this personal and communal growth. This will only truly **delay** the coming of the full healing and salvation of our world and the human family. We must persist in our efforts for healing and justice ... like the strong widow in this parable.

### **Final Thought: Patience**

One final thought: during my life, I have come to have a prayer for "patience." It is simply: "O Lord, give me patience. And give it to me NOW!" Wink! But I have also this week come upon a better prayer for patience written by St. Teresa of Avila. She was a strong woman, a leader and reformer in the Church. She had to put up with churchmen who brought her before the Inquisition even, but she prevailed. Now she is celebrated as a saint and a doctor of theology in the Church.

She wrote these words in her breviary at one point of her life, and they were found after she passed on into heaven.

**Let nothing trouble you.  
Let nothing scare you.  
All is fleeting.  
God alone is unchanging.  
Patience  
Everything obtains.  
Who possesses God  
Nothing wants.  
God alone suffices.**

*St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)*

We are not alone. God is with us.

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