

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 16, 2016

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Do you want to understand the meaning of this parable of the unjust judge? Our evangelist Saint Luke has the key to its meaning hanging right at the door! He reminds us our Lord Jesus gave this parable in order to teach us to pray always and not grow weary of doing so. Many people regard prayer as a luxurious option for holy people. So the Lord deliberately chose a mundane and very *unspiritual* setting for His teaching.

Jesus presents an unjust judge. And what a piece of work he is! This man fears neither God nor man; he is proud of his paganism, his fearlessness, his toughness, and his strength. He is the perfect symbol of power without accountability or responsibility. The widow, on the other hand, has no man to protect her. She has no money for a bribe. She has absolutely no chance to gain her suit. So what does she do? She bugs the daylights out of the unjust judge! She becomes a real pest, and the judge gives in to that. We are not even told there was merit in her case. Forget anything about her being good. Forget about the judge turning over a new leaf. The message is simply that the judge ruled in her favor *because she was a bother*. That is the story. That is what our Lord gave us.

By telling it this way, Jesus was giving us the lay of the land for our prayer life. Here is the *real* situation. Prayer isn't a luxury. The widow had no money. Prayer isn't an option. You get the feeling she was persistent because her life depended on the outcome. This brings us to the point. Piety is important only to those people who are under the illusion life is possible without God, and people who say their prayers and go to Mass are doing Almighty God a *favor*. Many such people think their worship is more good than necessary. If they knew the truth, however, they would regard God as more essential to their existence than the blood in their veins and the oxygen in their lungs. Then there would no longer be any notion of piety. Their approach to God would be like the widow's: a matter of *survival and crass self-interest*.

Christians must live under no illusions. Rather than view our commitment to God as a virtuous or exalted thing, we see it in terms of *sheer spiritual greed*. The parable of the unjust judge and persistent widow reminds us the circumstance of our discipleship is unvarnished need. Jesus, and He alone, has what we need, and

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we feel no more good or exalted in following Him than we do for being committed to food and water and air.

We have not become Christians in order to be better people or to help our communities, or to set a wholesome example for our children. These things may happen, and they *should* happen. But we have become Christians and we remain Christians, because we realize *there is no alternative*. Life and truth, the joys and the sorrows, only have meaning because Jesus Christ is Lord.

Christians believe that Jesus not only said, “I am the way, the life, and the truth, but that *He is* the way, the life, and the truth. That means the life we live, our very existence, makes no sense without Him, without Him in it, without life being oriented to Him, without His sovereignty over it. And we say more. We believe this is true not only for ourselves but for our whole society: its institutions, its judges and widows, its presidents and politicians, its school systems, its scientists, its physicians, its corner convenience store clerks, and the pin boy in the bowling alley. Whether they know it or not, Jesus is the way, the life, and the truth. Because all creation is His and He made it.

We have much for which to pray! Prayer is no luxury or option. It is a duty derived from the circumstances of our creation. It is as necessary as the air we breathe. It is the constant reality check that makes sense, and gives value to everything else, and holds all in perspective. We are to pray and work persistently for the changing of ourselves and the whole world. How persistently? The Lord gave us the example. It is like a widow going to a corrupt judge and driving him nuts until he does it her way. You and I are dedicated to doing it *the Lord’s way*.