

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
October 20, 2019

+

Our Lord Jesus told the parable of the persistent widow to encourage His disciples “to pray and not to faint.” Remember Jesus gave this instruction along the journey to Jerusalem and the Cross. Remember also the Twelve Apostles were part of God’s plan in establishing the ongoing work of His Son in creation. If the faith of these disciples failed, the establishment of Christ’s Church would fail. There was no “*Plan B*.” These men had no understudies. In Holy Week there were no reserves.

So the Lord’s purpose was to strengthen the faith of His disciples. For that reason He told the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge. After His Ascension, Christ’s followers would find themselves confronting unjust judges all the time. But by that time things in the created order would be *far more favorable* for them than for this widow. This would be true even though she won her case and the disciples might not immediately win theirs. The difference is the Cross of Christ. The Lord’s disciples would be *cooperating with grace* unleashed by the death of Christ on the Cross. The Cross makes the difference.

We can compare this difference in our consideration of the Lord’s parable. The widow was a stranger to the judge. She was neither related to him nor could she call any person of influence to assist her, and stand at her side. There was no one to help with her appeal. She was only one person and not the representative of some political action committee. The widow came to press her own case, on her own account, motivated by her own situation. She came to a judge who wanted to keep her away and keep her distance from him. We are told he was an *unjust judge* “who feared neither God nor man.” There was no encouragement from him to make her appeal, and she was told she could only appear before him at certain times when he considered cases. And since he was an unjust judge there was the risk her persistence could provoke his anger and a reaction against her.

Players of card games have a phrase for this situation: “the deck was stacked against her.” And the Son of God knew this situation was similar to the one in which the Twelve Apostles and Christ’s disciples would find themselves in the early years after Ascension Day. In the parable, with all these things going against her, the widow persisted in getting the judge to pronounce favorably in her case.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
October 20, 2019

+

But the moral is not just about persistence, but about *how much more* God's elect shall prevail in the promotion of the Lord's cause. The Apostolic witness is a matter of cooperating with divine grace. That means it is *Christ's cause*. And it is in His hands.

So consider how this is so. The widow was a stranger to the judge. God's praying people are His Own, whom He loves. She was one person. God's people are many, and when praying rightly are linked in prayer to the saints of Heaven. The judge told her to stay away. We have a Father Who bids us: "Come boldly to the Throne of Grace!" The judge was unjust. We come to a righteous Father. The widow came to press her own suit. God Himself motivates and inspires us in our prayers. When she came to court the woman had to speak for herself. But "We have an advocate with the Father" Who is His Own Beloved Son and "Whoever lives to make intercession for us." Whereas the woman had no encouragement from the bench, we are told to ask. And in contrast to a judge who is available only at certain hours, we may cry to God day and night. Indeed, in *Isaiah 62* we are told to give God no rest! Finally, the widow's persistence was in danger of provoking a negative reaction, but we are told our persistence in prayer is pleasing to God and when we ask rightly for what is God's will we are His delight.

As servant and followers of Christ we are told what the Twelve Apostles were told in the Lord's parable: to go on in faith and hope, knowing God does not desert His flock. However hard our path of suffering along the way, the victory will be Christ's even if the end is beyond our sight. *The Lord is sovereign.*

We do not know the *merits* of the widow's case. Was it just or unjust? But that really does not matter. Our Lord is interested in *faith*. How often He inquired about the faith of those who appealed to Him for healing! And in the telling of this parable it is implied when He looks down upon the predicament of His children, Blessed Jesus does not ask: "is there innocency?" but "*is there faith?*"