

GOSPEL

LUKE 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 'There was a judge in a certain town' he said who had neither fear of God nor respect for man. In the same town there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself "Maybe I have neither fear of God nor respect for man, but since she keeps pestering me I must give this widow her just rights, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death."

And the Lord said, 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them? I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?'

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In today's Gospel Jesus tells a parable on the need to pray always, never wearying. The main character is a widow whose insistent pleading with a dishonest judge succeeds in obtaining justice from him. Jesus concludes: if the widow succeeded in convincing that judge, do you think that God will not listen to us if we pray to him with insistence? Jesus' words are very strong: "And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night?"

"Crying day and night" to God! This image of prayer is striking, but let us ask ourselves: Why does God want this? Doesn't he already know what we need? What does it mean to "insist" with God?

This is a good question that makes us examine an important aspect of the faith: God invites us to pray insistently not because he is unaware of our needs or because he is not listening to us. On the contrary, he is always listening and he knows everything about us lovingly. On our daily journey, especially in times of difficulty, in the battle against the evil that is outside and within us, the Lord is not far away, he is by our side. We battle with him beside us, and our weapon is prayer which makes us feel his presence beside us, his mercy and also his help. But the battle against evil is a long and hard one; it requires patience and endurance, like Moses who had to keep his arms outstretched for the people to prevail (cf Ex 17:8-13). This is how it is: there is a battle to be waged each day, but God is our ally, faith in him is our strength and prayer is the expression of this faith. Therefore Jesus assures us of the victory, but at the end he asks: "when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?". If faith is snuffed out, prayer is snuffed out, and we walk in the dark. We become lost on the path of life.

Therefore, let us learn from the widow of the Gospel to pray always without growing weary. This widow was very good! She knew how to battle for her

children! I think of the many women who fight for their families, who pray and never grow weary. Today let us all remember these women who by their attitude provide us with a true witness of faith and courage, and a model of prayer. Our thoughts go out to them!

Pray always, but not in order to convince the Lord by dint of words! He knows our needs better than we do! Indeed persevering prayer is the expression of faith in a God who calls us to fight with him every day and at every moment in order to conquer evil with good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can you practically, ensure that you embrace the call of Jesus and the reminder from Pope Francis to pray always?
- Do you take the battle against evil and injustice seriously in your life. Are you conscious of the need for God's presence constantly in the battles that surround you and that we are all caught up in?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.