

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
16th October 2022 - 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Exodus 17:8-13. Psalm: 120. 2nd: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2. **Gospel:** Luke 18:1-8.

NEVER GIVE UP You can't have missed the cover of the newsletter: I'm very conscious of some of our people who have not returned to Mass. This is reflected across the nation, and perhaps across the globe.

This is the third week of Jesus teaching on prayer and faith, and the dominant theme today is that prayer is more than a matter of short sprints. It takes stamina and perseverance. It is Moses' tenacity and steadfastness in prayer that win the day for Israel. The stamina is what one would expect of such a giant of faith.

The Amalekites controlled the caravan routes between Egypt and Arabia, living in the Negeb, the southernmost section of Israel. That God should seek to destroy the Amalekites should be understood in the context of Israel's struggle for survival in the wilderness. They had threatened Israel's existence, possibly hoping to totally wipe them out, and in a sense that was a threat to God himself. So the Psalm tells of God's presence with us, to rescue us: a tree to shade us; to guard us from the ravages of evil.

St Paul in the 2nd reading is telling Timothy to stand firm by his beliefs. Paul saying that whatever the situation in which he finds himself in the course of his work, he will always be able to draw insight and encouragement from the Scriptures. God is with him in the Scriptures as they are inspired by God.

St Luke says the purpose of the parable was to induce the disciples '**to pray continually, and never lose heart.**' In a way, this is a secondary purpose. The primary purpose was to strengthen their faith, as is clear from the last verse. "When the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?"

In view of what lay ahead the disciple's faith was a matter of the greatest concern, for, should it fail, then the whole plan and design of God in establishing his church would fail also. The faith recommended in this parable is the faith that, however difficult and apparently hopeless things may be, God will in the end see justice done.

If this is so, then nothing that the world can do can be of any avail. Faith will soar above death, pain and sin, and turn what looks like defeat into victory.

The key word is **justice**, which occurs four times. The judge is a symbol of power without responsibility. He is a thoroughly bad judge since he fears neither God nor man, nor apparently the laws of either. He is proud of his power, his atheism, his fearlessness, his toughness, his strength.

On the other hand, the widow is the embodiment of weakness. She represents the poor and needy in society. Widows were often powerless and vulnerable in ancient society. Both Jesus and Luke take a compassionate interest in their plight. She has no one to protect her, no money to bribe the judge, and apparently no chance whatever of gaining her suit. Yet in the end she wins and weakness prevails over strength.

The parable touches the heart of the gospel; the fact that what looks like weakness is strength, what looks like suffering is joy, what looks like death is life. But the victory cannot be won without faith. The persistence of the widow was the product of her faith – faith in the justice of her cause: faith in the power of perseverance; faith that she could in time bend the will of that hard, arrogant judge to make him do what she wanted, and what was right.

The Christian disciple is encouraged to go on in faith and hope, knowing that God will not desert his elect, and that, however hard the path of suffering along which we must travel, the victory will be ours in the end. Luke was right to introduce the parable with words about prayer, for faith can be maintained only by constant prayer, day and night.

Faith is such an elusive thing it needs propping up by prayer. Prayer without faith is impossible. The two stand or fall together. "**But when the Son of Man comes will he find any faith on earth?**"