

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Persistence.

That's a customary explanation given for the point to this Gospel story; only the way we have often presented it is to cast the judge in the role of the God-figure.

Consequently, in our usual dramatic portrayals,

God is implicitly the one who is slow to listen to the pleas of a poor and vulnerable widow — a woman without a husband, without status, without income, without security.

According to this account, God only grants the woman her claims because she pesters him to the point that God loses his patience and reluctantly gives in.

Persistence triumphs.

But there's a problem with the picture this story paints.

The judge, the God-figure, does not come across as someone we would want to emulate.

The Gospel story tells us that he neither "feared God nor respected any human being."

Beyond that, the sense we get is that God is someone to bargain with or pester to the point of wearing him down.

Fr. William Bausch, in the publication *Hungry, And You Fed Me*, suggests

another possible way to understand this story.

The question he asks is: "Why not see the widow as the image of God?"

So if the widow is now pictured as the God-like figure, it becomes possible to arrive at a whole new meaning for this parable.

From this perspective the message is still about the importance of persistence,

but the persistent one is now presented as that person who — often against all odds — keeps resisting injustice, keeps renouncing discrimination, keeps opposing bigotry in all its dimensions.

The widow, then, takes on the role of a Rosa Parks, a person who endured until justice was achieved.

The original meaning of the Gospel passage is still maintained, only now it becomes the constant commitment to seek justice wherever it is being denied.

This stance then insists we refuse to relent in our requirements to provide our children with adequate education and health care.

It insists that all of us demand that our prisoners are treated with respect, that our soldiers are given appropriate health care,

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that our elderly are able to afford an adequate pension, that our planet is respected as a God-given gift.

It's a story about persistently hungering and thirsting for justice.

The problem, though, is that throughout human history, multitudes have begged God to grant relief to those who are burdened with pain and sorrow.

And yet injustice remains. Peace seems hopeless. Bigotry persists.

As a consequence, many lose heart. They find that perseverance in the face of repeated horrors is one of the greatest challenges that human beings have to face.

In his famous "Letter from the Birmingham City Jail," as quoted in Martin Luther King's book *Why We Can't Wait*, Dr. King writes:

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor;

it must be demanded by the oppressed. ...

For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!'... This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'

We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.' "

Today's Gospel story ultimately becomes the Christian answer to the

painful reality of justice delayed and denied:

namely, that God's plan for a kingdom of justice and peace will eventually be accomplished.

In the meantime, we are called to "pray always without becoming weary."

Persistence.