

THE EMMAUS SERIES

29th Sunday Year C

Exodus 17:8-13

2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2

Luke 18:1-8

Will not God see justice done?

A very typical human situation: a corrupt judge, pestered by a persistent widow, finally gives in to her, not because he is won over to acting justly, but because she is going to ‘worry him to death’. We see an unfamiliar side of Jesus is in this parable; he is not long faced - he can speak of human foibles with an ironical humour. The story was all too common in the world that Jesus knew. The widow who cannot get a fair hearing, probably concerning her inheritance, represents ‘the poor’ with whom Jesus identifies. He is certainly not likening his Father to the judge of the parable, but using the parable as the basis of an ‘even more so’ argument, such as we find in other parables. Having caught their attention with his ironical little story, Jesus is presented by Luke as emphasising the trust in God that should motivate the prayer of his disciples.

The sequence of Luke’s compilation leading to this text helps us to understand the implications of Jesus’ teaching. Between the teaching on ‘faith’ that we have considered on the last two Sundays, and today’s reading, there a passage concerning ‘the coming of the kingdom of God’ and the day of ‘the Son of Man’s return’. Faith, we have seen, is an expectant openness to God’s action in our midst. Now our prayer is linked with the openness we should have, as look forward to the day ‘when the Son of Man comes’.

If the first concern of a lively faith is being alive to God’s action in our lives, our prayer should begin and end in recognition that our lives have their real meaning in the unfolding of the plan conceived before all ages in the loving designs of God. This plan - the great virtue of Christian hope assures us - will certainly be realised; and in its realisation, all things will be turned to good. Of course, our personal needs and the concerns of those dear to us should be brought constantly before God in our prayer; but this should be done in the knowledge that these things are part of the plan of God, revealed in all its mercy and generosity in the coming of the Saviour, and realised through a providence that touches every detail of our lives and those who are dear to us. Prayer, Jesus is teaching us, is a living out of our faith; and, at the same time, our faith grows and matures through our life of prayer.

Our reading from the letter to Timothy is a good complement to the lesson of the gospel – urging us to a greater familiarity with the Scriptures. The whole story of the ‘inspired Scriptures’ is the unfolding of God’s plan and the great promise it brings to Christian hope. This story of the Scriptures is important in the life of the Church ‘for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives and teaching them to be holy’.

Scholars assure us that the last words of the gospel are not pessimistic. Jesus knows that he will find faith when he comes – in ‘the chosen ones who cry out to God day and night’ – but his words are a warning for those who need it.

John Thornhill sm