

“Don’t lose your heart!” Luke 18:1-8

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Today we have one more of Jesus parables. This time the parable of the judge and the widow. Jesus didn’t tell parables for the sake of just telling them. He told them to make a point, to teach people. What was He teaching with this parable?

Perhaps that God is like this unjust judge? That He doesn’t care much about us. Many think of God this way. Or that if you persist in your prayers, you will get whatever you want? Just keep pressing! Again, you can often hear this kind of teaching.

It is difficult to read and understand this parable on its own, taking it as a separate text, for in Luke’s gospel it is a part of a larger section. Before Jesus told this parable, He was answering the question posed by Pharisees: “When would God’s kingdom come?”

Jesus was explaining both to His disciples and also to Pharisees how is this going to happen. “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

The Kingdom of God is (*already is!*) in the midst of you! It was true for them, and it is true also for us. The Kingdom of God is in the midst of us. How, we may ask?

When Jesus was about to return to His Father, He promised to His disciples. “I’m with you till the end of the age.” “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

He is with us, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus. Whenever we listen or meditate upon His words, we keep receiving His Spirit. We receive Him in the

Baptism, [as Ruby just did,] we receive Him in the Lord's Supper, as we'll do shortly, we receive Him when we read the Word of God, as we do now.

For as Jesus said: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. (John 6:63) He gives us faith, He gives us hope, He gives us peace that surpasses human understanding.

His Kingdom already is already among us. That's true. But just a few words later Jesus gave His disciples a different picture. For "as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so *will (still in future)* the Son of Man be in his day." (Luke 17:24)

Thus, on the one hand, the Kingdom of God is already here, on the other hand, in its fullness it is yet to come. We are still waiting for Christ glorious return, when every eye will see him with all the heavenly hosts. When He will gather before His throne all nations and will separate sheep from goat, and will bring us into His Father's kingdom.

We can see that this is the context in which Jesus tells this parable. The big picture, so to speak. The beginning and the end. He tells it to His disciples, that is, also to us. We are in this dual state, His Kingdom is already among us, and His Kingdom is going to be fully revealed only when Jesus returns.

Today we live in this tension between 'already and not yet', and this parable was told to encourage us while we are still waiting for Jesus return. Because as for today, there are so many things around us that don't resemble God's Kingdom at all. I mean here in the Church and not somewhere else.

Even if we are God's children, we suffer from injustice, from broken relationships, sometimes even in congregations, from lack of forgiveness and compassion, from contempt about our worldviews and values.

We suffer from sicknesses, even in our parish we have several people fighting for their health and their life right now. We suffer from our own sins and shameful passions, from addictions, from violence.

And we suffer because others in their arrogance and ignorance sin against us. It is easy to lose the heart, when things go wrong and wrong and then even worse. That's our situation when Jesus tells us this parable about why not to lose our hearts.

Let's look at the parable. "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because

this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”

That’s an interesting description of the judge. It tells a lot. He neither feared God, nor was ashamed from man. We can read in the Old Testament what good judges were supposed to be like. Not partial, but God fearing, knowing that ultimately justice comes from the Lord, that we all are responsible before Him, for He knows not just our deeds, but also our hearts, as our consciences daily witness to us.

This judge is described as the one who didn’t fear God. Besides, he was not ashamed before man. It meant that you couldn’t influence him appealing to his honor, showing how shameful are his actions, nor invoking God’s name. He wouldn’t bother about it. When you put these two things together, no fear of God and no shame from man, you get a person who is interested only in one thing, his own wellbeing.

Courts existed so that justice could prevail, and especially in cases with those who were very vulnerable, orphans and widows as the first among them. From what we know about Jesus time, courts sometimes could be very corrupted. Often one, who would give the largest bribe, would get his justice. Those who had a power and means, in these situations would get their cases settled in a way they desired.

“And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, “Give me justice against my adversary.”” When we read these words we don’t realize how unusual this situation is.

The very fact that the widow went to the court was so unusual. Middle East was and is a world of man. There was no place for woman in contexts like courts. The fact that she was there bears witness that there was no one who could help her. No one! She has to go and seek for justice herself. A woman in men’s world.

Picture this situation, mob of man, shouting, arguing, gathered around this judge, whose secretaries try to negotiate bribes and make a deals before the case goes to the judge. Money, lies, greed, corruption, and among these people, the widow. Pleading for her justice.

On the one hand we have a corrupt man, who is in a position of almost unrestricted power, who doesn’t fear God and is not ashamed from man, who is only interested in his own gain. On the other hand we have widow, one of the most vulnerable members of society, pleading for her case in totally hopeless situation.

She can’t coerce the judge, she can’t bribe him, she has no one to help her, she is not even considered as equal in this situation. Two radically opposite ends of spectrum, a powerful tyrant and a helpless widow. What can be further apart?

However, even if the situation seemed hopeless the widow kept coming and seeking for justice. There are few cultural details that could help us to understand this picture better. We could imagine Middle East court settings comparing them with Middle Eastern markets, as they are shown in movies.

Noise, crowd, shouting, hustle, arguing. And on the fringe of all of this – the widow, trying to catch the judge’s attention. How could she do it? That’s true, that Middle East was and is men’s world, and women can’t do many things. But on the other hand, it’s also true that men in the Middle East had and have a very high respect to women.

Women can afford to do something or to say something that would destroy man if he did it. Also in this case, we can imagine this widow doing her best, so to speak, to get judges attention and justice in her case. Not exactly attacking him, but probably shouting at him in a way and with words that were difficult to cope with even for this man.

Finally he gave up... “this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.” Whatever impossible it seemed, with her persistence the widow received her justice.

What does it mean for us? And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

This rhetorical principle is called ‘from the smallest to the largest’. If even *this* happened, then how much more *that* will happen. On the one hand, the judge and the widow, on the other, God the Father and His elect, His promises. One the one hand almost impossible situation, on the other, the most certain one. Apostle Paul puts it this way: “If He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

We, as God’s children, are complete opposite to the situation described in this parable. If even this widow got justice, how much more our prayers will be heard and our vindication granted! This is Jesus message. Don’t lose heart!

We need to remember that we are between ‘already and not yet’ of God’s Kingdom. We have all promises, and God is faithful, He doesn’t change, what He has promised He will deliver in due time. We have His word, we already have His Spirit, and even more, we already have seen how God fulfills His promises.

Yes, good, but people keep asking, if God is powerful and just, how can He allow His elect to suffer? Why do we still need to experience all the bad things? It seemed so inscrutable mystery for Mohammad that he decided to rewrite Jesus story.

To show that God vindicates His loved ones, Mohammad told that actually Jesus was saved from the cross, that instead of Him other man was crucified. God saved His Son. The same way He will also save us.

It probably resonates with our thinking. If God loves you, He saves you from all problems. If problems still happen, maybe God doesn't love me? How to deal with it? That's why Jesus added at the end: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

What kind of faith? Faith as trust into God's promises. Has He failed to fulfill any of His promises? No! The Bible is full on testimonies that He is faithful. If He had failed, enemies of Christ would have screamed loud about it everywhere.

He failed to save *only one* person. You know whom. Himself. Jesus gave His life in exchange to ours. He was challenged, the same people whom He came to save crucified Him and them mocked: "Save yourself and we'll believe you!" He failed to save Himself, for He so much loved us, that no price was too high for Him to redeem us. To redeem you, each of you. Why? Because we are so good? No, because we are sinners, condemned to death, and by redeeming us, He wants to give us new life.

Then happened the most incredible event in the history of this world. The strangest vindication you can think of. Jesus did what He had promised. He rouse from the dead. That sounds unbelievable. I know and you know it. That sounded unbelievable to those who heard it. It still seemed unbelievable to those hundreds of eyewitnesses who saw Him alive after resurrection. And still... God did as He had promised. He is faithful. He conquered death, to give us eternal life.

We live between 'already and not yet'. Christ has already risen, God has already showed that at the resurrection He will restore the perfect goodness of His creation and will establish perfect justice for His elect. This is faith and trust that Jesus was talking about. This is our faith. This is our trust to God, who keeps His promises.

And this knowledge helps us today. For we know, that if we suffer and die with Christ, we'll also live and reign with Him. Don't lose your heart, instead, rejoice, for your names are written in heaven.

Amen.