

## TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 20/2013

Exodus 17: 8-13; 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2; Luke 18: 1-8

### Introduction

A small boy told his father he was going to pray for a puppy. The father said: “Why don’t you pray instead for a baby brother and maybe in a little while you’ll get one.” That seemed a good idea and the boy prayed for that. However when nothing happened after a month he lost interest and didn’t persist. Then a month later his mother came home from the hospital with not one, but two baby brothers. His father said: “See, I told you if you prayed you might get a baby brother.” The little boy said: “Yes, but aren’t you glad I stopped praying after one month?” The widow in today’s Gospel had more persistence than that. She was seeking justice and she was not going to give up until she got it.

Over the past thirty or forty years in our country we have had some high profile examples of people who spent years in prison and then, perhaps through something like DNA testing, were proven to be innocent. It shows us that even in Canada the justice system can fail. It is far worse in many other countries. Years ago I worked with a family trying to get their son out of a foreign jail. It was only when they paid a large bribe that they were able to succeed. The situation of the widow in today’s *Gospel* was somewhat similar. Some influential person had done her an injustice. The judge was afraid to offend that important person. At the same time the widow couldn’t afford to bribe the judge into hearing her case. Eventually it was only her persistence that paid off. Justice can be hard to get. No wonder people sometimes say: “There’s no justice!” The Gospel has *two* important things to say to us today about that.

### There Will be Justice for All but Not Necessarily in This World

At the end of today’s Gospel reading Jesus asks: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” His words remind us that there is a final court of justice each of us will face, at our death and at the end of the world. That is when each of us will have to stand before the Son of Man and give an account of how we lived our lives. This is an important truth. The only judgment that will matter in the long run is God’s final judgment on each one of us. This is not to say that we should not seek justice in this life. However it is to say we are foolish if we expect to get it in every case. After all, our Lord Jesus Christ was unjustly put to death. So were thousands of martyrs, and so were millions of other innocent victims throughout history. If we have faith, then, the only vindication we really count on is what God will accomplish at our death and at the end of the world. Our call in the meantime is to persevere, in prayer and in faithfulness.

### At the Same Time, God is on the Side of Those Unjustly Treated in This World

Listen again to the words of Jesus: “Will not God see justice done to his chosen? I promise he will see justice done to them and done speedily.” There is a great biblical tradition behind these words of the Lord. Early in the Old Testament it became apparent that the people most often unjustly treated were the poor. So we find the prophets saying such things as the following: “Maybe people in positions of power often ignore or mistreat the poor, maybe earthly leaders usually fail them. However God, who cares about justice, will be the vindicator of the poor and the powerless.” It is in this sense that Pope John Paul II once said to a huge crowd of poor Mexican peasants: “You are God’s favourites.”

This is why we as a Church, and as individual Catholics, are called on by our faith to be on the side of the poor and the powerless of our world. In the first of the great social encyclicals of the Catholic Church, published in 1891, Pope Leo XIII said, “The rich have many ways of shielding themselves,” indicating that we have to be on the side of those who don’t have that sort of advantage. Pope Pius XI, writing in 1937, said the following to priests about their pastoral priorities: “Go to the workingman, especially where he is poor, and in general, go to the poor.”

There are countless abuses of power in today’s world. Many women and children are abused. Many working people are unfairly treated. The poorer countries of our world often receive shabby treatment from the richer ones. The people of those countries are regularly exploited by huge transnational corporations. In these situations there can be no doubt about what side God expects us to be on. That is why our faith calls us to work for justice, especially for the poor. There are many ways in which each of us can do this, through political action, through our labour union, through community action groups, through careful attention to how we spend and invest our money, and so on. We need to stand up and be counted!

### Conclusion

There is a wonderful balance in today’s Gospel that we should not miss. Some people have made the observation that years ago Catholics were all intent on getting to heaven, but today they seem more intent on changing this world. That is a false contrast. As the Gospel shows, the true goal of any Christian is to get to heaven. If we expect full justice short of that we are very foolish. At the same time, if we want to qualify for heaven, then we had better pay attention to those unjustly treated. That means working for needed change in this world.