

Yesterday was the Feast of St. Luke, & so I wanted to begin with a brief word of thanks to God for giving us Luke — an evangelist, physician, companion of St. Paul, and the writer of both the Gospel that bears his name & the Book of Acts, which records the story of the early Church.

St. Luke was a man who knew what it meant to care for broken bodies. And so it's appropriate that his Gospel is punctuated by an awareness of people struggling: the poor, the socially marginalized, & the forgotten. Luke shows Jesus eating with sinners, touching lepers, raising up fallen women, and telling the gospel truth to the powerful. Luke was a Gentile & emphasizes that *salvation is for all*: not for Jews only but for all the world.

There is much more that could be said of St. Luke, but let me point out two more things. First of all, without Luke, we would not have the story of the Road to Emmaus, & we would definitely not have carols like “Away in a manger” — not to mention all the other ways the Feast of Christmas is informed by details of Christ's infancy, which Luke alone was inspired to record.

Second of all, Luke alone records beloved parables like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. For myself, I can't imagine my life without those comforting words: “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around his son” (15:20). And that image has a lot of

traction in my prison ministry. Next week, we will have the parable of the Pharisee & the Tax Collector — & that's another story that serves to remind us that Christ came not for the self-righteous but to save lost souls.

Turning to our gospel today, we have another parable that only Luke preserves. And, again, I can't imagine ministry without the parable we just read: the Parable of the Persistent Widow. This parable is a story of two people: a widow & a judge. In Jesus' day, a woman's status and financial support were tied to male family members, & the fact that this widow is in court alone means there is no man in her family who will advocate for her. So she is alone with no power, & only a very small voice in court. Meanwhile, she is in the court of an unjust judge — a man with all the power, & no concern for God.

This woman has been wronged, & instead of addressing the injustice the judge simply brushes her aside. *What's in it for me? Nothing. Next...*

The judge was comfortable in his life, & evidently he could sleep at night without fulfilling his calling. But the widow doesn't let his laziness & unconcern stop her. She keeps showing up. Day after day. She pleads. She nags. *She won't let go until the judge finally gives in.* And so he does. Not because he has a change of heart, but simply because she just won't stop pestering him. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. "I will grant her justice, so that she doesn't wear me out."

The woman is relentless. She just won't give up. And that is how Jesus reminds his disciples "about their need to pray always & not to lose heart" (18:1)...
about OUR need to pray always & not to lose heart.
Jesus is saying that, if even a crooked judge will finally do the right thing when someone persists, how much more will our Father in heaven — who loves us — see that justice is done?

Jesus is not saying that we have to nag God into listening. He's just reminding us not to lose heart. Keep praying. Keep trusting that God is with you & for you. *God sees, God hears, & God will act.*

And let's be honest — many of us need that reminder. Because we've been praying for a long time...

for a child who's wandered,
for a healing that hasn't come.

for a job, or an answer, or just a little peace.

Because it's easy to wonder if God is in fact listening to us. If God *actually* holds us in the palm of his hand. If God's arm does really have the power to stretch & save us.

You see, Luke wrote for people like us who can use the reminder: for the widow, the tax collector, the leper, the outcast, the worker trying to make ends meet — & all of those who look to God in hope of salvation.

And what does Luke's Jesus say to us? He says: "Pray and don't give up." The inference is clear:

Faith is not some thing we just lean back & receive.
Faith is showing up.
Faith is knocking on the door again & again & again.
Faith is not giving up, trusting that God hasn't given up on us.

Jesus ends the parable with a striking question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"
That is the question. When our Lord comes again, will HE FIND FAITH?

Will he find people who haven't given up, even in the face of terrible circumstances?

Will he find people like the widow, who are "persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable" (1 Tim.)?

Will he find people like St. Luke, a Gentile who listened to stories of the Messiah, paid attention, & set down what he could gather of the life of Jesus?

When Jesus returns, may he find in us a faith that's tested but still standing.

A faith that prays & doesn't give up.

A faith that's stiff-necked & full of hope.

A faith that will never let go — because it knows the One who holds us never will.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.