

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [C]

Exodus 17: 8 - 13

2 Timothy 3: 14 - 4: 2

Luke 18: 1 - 8

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Sunday after Sunday we come to the Eucharist with all our hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies.

Sometimes really wanting to be here, others when I'd rather be somewhere else: but most of the time just coming because we always do. It's become part of what we do, and who we are.

As with our day to day lives, Mass often seems to be just the same every week, and we cruise along, going with the flow.

But I wonder if anyone comes here to be challenged by the experience of hearing the word the Lord speaks to us through Scripture?

The Word, which the Letter to the Hebrews tells us is: "Full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife; it exposes us for what we really are." Heb. 4: 12

The second reading, and Gospel today are particularly like that.

They challenge us to think how important, or not, Jesus is to me: also to reflect on, and prepare for, the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time.

But is Jesus important to me - to us?

Do we actually look forward to, and pray with excitement and anticipation, for His return?

Is it something we ever think about?

Just as the Scripture in Advent, in six weeks time, prepares us for that moment too.

That's the challenge for us in the Scripture today.

Jesus looks straight at us through the words of the Gospel, and says:

"When I, the Son of Man return, how many will I find who have faith?" Lk. 18: 8

His words end the Parable of the Persistent Widow who kept asking a judge for justice.

The judge didn't really care about the people who came to him for judgement: neither did he have a sense of right or wrong, nor that his judgements should be founded on the Lord's justice.

Widows in Jesus' time were particularly helpless and vulnerable as they were non-people in the eyes of the law, and society; so this widow only had her determined persistence to get justice.

And, in the end, her persistence pays off, because this cynical worldly man gives her justice, if only to get her off his back!

Then Jesus contrasts the judge with Himself.

He's nothing like the judge, even though we may think He is when He doesn't seem to answer our prayers.

The emphasis there though is on the word seem.

The Lord, in my experience, always answers prayer; but not always in the way I want Him to.

Sometimes the answer is uncomfortable, and a challenge; but His answer is always best for me in the end.

Jesus says to us, that like the widow in her search for justice, we too have to be persistent, and constant in our prayer.

He says we have to: "Plead with him day and night." Lk. 18: 7

"When I, [Jesus says] return, how many will I find who have faith?" Lk. 18: 8

Faith, which perseveres in prayer, and faithfulness to the Lord.

"Faith [which] is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Heb. 11: 1

Jesus, through that question, is preparing us for the approaching hour when He returns.

A time that will require perseverance, and constancy such as the widow showed.

The theme of perseverance, constancy, faithfulness, and the return of Jesus are there also in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy

"You must remain faithful [Paul says to Timothy] to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have known the Holy Scripture, which has given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 3: 14 - 15

Showing how, from an early age, Timothy had held constantly to the Christian faith his Mother Eunice, and Grandmother Lois, passed on to him. See 2 Tim. 1: 5

Catholics have majored on the Sacraments, and often put Scripture on the back burner; yet here Paul commends Timothy for knowing the Scriptures and says that: "All Scripture is God-breathed." 2 Tim. 3: 16

The Holy Spirit is breathing life into Scripture just as He does in the Sacraments; and we need to immerse ourselves in Scripture, allowing the Spirit to breathe life from Scripture into us. Because the Spirit breathes through Scripture it means that Paul wasn't just writing a letter to his friend Timothy.

It had relevance for Timothy in his actual situation; but also opens up for us the truth about the Lord, and what He would have us do now in our lives.

It also looks forward to the Second Coming of Jesus, and these strands are woven together where Paul says: "I urge you before God and before Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favourable or not." 2 Tim. 4: 1 - 2

Very simply, that's what all of us in the Church are called to do.

That's our vocation as Christians.

Just as Timothy's Mother and Grandmother handed on the Christian faith to him, which they'd received from someone else; that's what we're to do.

So often we're afraid, and embarrassed of talking to people about Jesus, as if we're bound and gagged.

But, in another place, Paul wrote to Timothy that: "The word of God cannot be chained."

2 Tim. 2: 9

No, God's word can't be chained.

Yet we're links in a living chain, which stretches back to Jesus' words and actions, when He: "Became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jn. 1: 14

And the chain stretches forward through time until: "Everyone will see [Jesus] arrive on the clouds with power and great glory." Lk. 21: 27

But will that chain be broken because I'm scared of living out my faith as a Christian so that others can see it, and be attracted to it?

No it won't, because of His promise to us, His Church, in the words He spoke to Peter: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." Mt. 16: 18 - 19

He trusts each of us to carry the Word of the Good News about Him to the world.

But we're not on our own, because He's given us His Spirit to enable us to do it: "Whether the time is favourable or not." 2 Tim. 4: 2

If we do that together, when Jesus returns, or we meet Him at the end of our lives - whichever happens first - then we'll be able to say to Him: 'Yes, there is faith on the earth, because I played my small part in passing it on.'

If we let Scripture have its way with us, all of this is within our reach. Because of course, Scripture not only unveils the Living God we know in Jesus Christ; but through our reading and reflecting on it, it works this knowledge of God into the fabric of our lives.

This is the work of a lifetime, not an instant quick fix.

But let's remember these words of Paul, reminding us that the Holy Spirit will be our guide if we put out into: "Deep water," Lk. 5: 4 and embark on this adventure: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Cor. 3: 17 - 18