

### **October 16, 2016 Persistence in Prayer Homily:**

The English essayist G.K. Chesterton maintained, throughout his magnificent literary career, that more wisdom can be found in popular fairy tales than in many learned books of philosophy and theology. In view of today's parable of "the widow and the dishonest judge," we may wish to single out just one of the most enchanting fairy tales ever written.

A young girl's sole desire is to return home. She is befriended by a good witch, who informs her that only one person could possibly honor her request, the redoubtable Wizard of Oz. He lives in a far off place. She then begins her journey. On the long and winding road to her destination, she picks up three new friends. Once they reach the palace of the all wise one, they are initially turned away. They are finally admitted after informing the gatekeeper of the young girl's friendship with the good witch. Their initial visit with the all wise one is a near disaster. Again, they are turned away. But the young girl is persistent. She is bound and determined to return home. After dispatching the evil witch, they return to the palace and are again rebuffed by the all powerful Wizard. But the Wizard is exposed as a fraud. The young girl's persistence finally pays off. Her name is Dorothy and she awakens after a bad dream to find herself at home in Kansas. The tale of "The Wizard of Oz" is familiar to all of us. It offers the reader a powerful lesson on perseverance and unflinching determination. One might say it is a tale about the efficacy of prayer.

The parable of Jesus features a judge, who, we are told "regarded neither God nor man" (Lk.18:2). In the language of today, he would be considered a secularist and an egoist. His adversary, a widow, has a double disadvantage: she is female and poor. She has only one weapon in her weak arsenal: persistence. She is utterly relentless. She pesters the judge, keeps coming at him; she will not be denied.

The key to understanding the parable is provided by Our Lord. It is "the need to pray always and not to lose heart." (Lk.18:1) The persistent prayer of an oppressed woman prevails over the laziness and venality of a lazy judge. Jesus wants us to understand that God, much more than the unjust judge, will listen to the earnest request of those who have recourse to him with trusting perseverance. "And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you he will vindicate them speedily." (Lk.18:7-8) One's prayer is never in vain.

The evangelist St. Luke lays great stress on prayer in his gospel. So often in his gospel do we find Jesus at prayer. In his reflections on this parable, a man of contemplative prayer, a Trappist monk named Thomas Keating writes: "God responds not so much by granting individual requests but by changing us from inside. Prayer is not designed to change God or the situation, but to change us".

If, at times, we weaken and give in to discouragement, let this parable give us strength to carry on as disciples of Jesus.

Amen!