

[Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 121; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2; Luke 18:1-8]

There are so many things in this life that we just don't understand... that we just can't comprehend. For example, we don't really understand disease. Why is a youngster perfectly healthy for 13 years of his life... and then suddenly just happens to be in a place where he suddenly encounters some germ or bacteria that invades his body and destroys it?

And we don't understand accidents. They are so random and indiscriminate. You start out a day that is like any other day... and then something happens in a matter of seconds... and life is forever different. You can never go back beyond that accident. On and on we could go with our list... of things we don't really understand.

-- Why is there so much pain in our world? -- Why do good people suffer?

-- Why do we hurt one another? -- Why can't people get along?

-- And why do some of the best prayers seem to go unanswered?

All of these difficult questions prompt us to raise yet another crucial question: What can we count on from God? When we face the troubles of the world, the heartaches of life, and the tough challenges of this existence, what can we count on from God?

Here is an example of a **WRONG** answer. A dear parishioner in my last parish, late 30's, early 40's, with young children, was dying of cancer. The parish held her up in prayer for months, years, and the prayer group surrounded her home in a prayer chain. When the husband came out to tell the group that his wife had passed on, on the people in the group said, "Well, she must have not had enough faith." Do you think that husband came back to church after her wife's Funeral Mass?

The parable in today's Gospel from Luke 18 points us toward a real answer. It involves two people: an unjust, arrogant judge and a humble but persistent woman. He gives into her not only because she is persistent, not even because she might hit him, but because it is the right thing to do. Justice.

Jesus is not suggesting that God is like that judge. Jesus is not comparing them; he is contrasting them. This is a "How Much More" parable. Jesus was saying: If a selfish arrogant, unfeeling, unjust judge can help you if you ask, then **how much more** can God who loves you intensely help you when you ask? This parable means be patient, don't lose heart, don't give up, keep on trusting, because you can count on God... and God will come through for you.

His answer will be one of the following and it may not be the same as ours or the one answer you might be thinking of or expect. God will say: Yes. No. Not yet. No, because I have something better in mind for you.

Although God often seems way too slow, whether it takes months or years, (and it often does) before your problem gets resolved, Jesus is in fact at your side immediately delivering you from despair, in the very moment you cry out to Him. But, Jesus asks, will He find faith? Like Moses in the face of battle, the strength of God helps us to keep our arms raised in victory and triumph. And sometimes that strength of God comes from one another. Like Aaron and Hur supporting the arms of Moses, we need to support one another from time to time.

That is what you folks do best for me and for each other. We support one another with our love, our prayer and our affirmation. That's why we're here.

Are you still feeling miserable after calling out to God for help? Jesus is still at your side begging for your trust. Are you frustrated because God isn't removing the obstacles you're facing? Jesus wants you to follow Him in a direction that's different than where you think you should go. We can still experience God's victory even while the injustice continues.

If you are being bullied in school, God knows about it and God hates it. If you are being harassed in the workplace, for any reason, God hates it. If you are being taken advantage of -- or if you are taking unfair advantage of someone else -- there will be a day of reckoning and judgment. If there is anyone anywhere praying for God to intervene and put an end to their oppression, eventually that prayer will be heard and that which is wrong will be set right.

While you and I are waiting for God to bring in a perfect and just society, you and I are God's answer to the injustice in our world. That's what it means to take up a cross and follow Jesus. It's not a comfortable position to be in. It's not popular. But it is Christ's way. As St. Paul says to St. Timothy, "remain faithful to what you have learned and believed... whether it is convenient or inconvenient."

God is coming to your rescue! In this Sunday's Gospel reading, God promises to secure the rights of His faithful ones who seek His justice. When we're abused, neglected, rejected, abandoned, or falsely accused, God comes to our rescue.

And speedily, He says! What? He's not helping you fast enough? Is He breaking His promise with you?

The real question is not "Where is Jesus?" nor "Why doesn't He care enough to help me sooner?" The question that matters -- for the healing of our souls -- is stated in the last sentence of this Gospel passage: As He's arriving to help us, do we greet Him with faith? Or is fear spinning our minds in such turmoil that we don't see Him as he stands right next to us offering a helping hand?

If we're not living by faith, we inadvertently expand our problems.

We all have adversaries. Jesus is wielding His sword of truth against the spirits of darkness who are working against you; He is driving them away. But if we reject the truth He wields, his sword is of no help to us. What about the troublemakers who continually annoy you? When our eyes are on them instead of on Jesus, we miss the healing embrace that He's offering to us as vindication.

When we live by faith, we experience God's vindication every day, even while injustices continue. We experience it in our hearts as we receive His peace and His patience and His endurance.

Our questions for this week's reflection: What injustices are frustrating you today? What evil is being done against you? What will you do right now to be a faith-filled follower of Christ? What action will you take to conquer your fears and choose to give God your trust?

Paul advises Timothy to persist in doing the right thing despite how he feels in a given moment. We remember that our spiritual journey should not be gauged simply by our emotions, but by the deepest recesses of our hearts. Emotions are one thing; dedication is another. Is faith inconvenient? You bet it is. So, are you going to be a Catholic of commitment, or a Catholic of convenience? Choose well. Choose wisely. AMEN!