

St Pius & St Anthony 29th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

We get a glimpse of Luke's Heroes Club today! Everyone has one (As musician Dave Grohl (of music group Foo Fighters) sings "There goes my hero"!)

Everybody has one. Luke has several! Who might they be? Knowing Luke to be the literary classicist and ancient archivist that he is, is his hero the famous Greek historian Herodotus or storyteller Homer? No. How about a power player like one of the Roman Caesars, No. Or how about an accomplished athlete turned political leader like Spartacus? No, he has got them, but Luke's heroes are unlikely ones (maybe we could guess that, as we hear Jesus in Luke often say things like "The first is last and last is first" 13:30 & "the least is greatest and greatest is least" 9:48)

Last week, we heard Luke celebrate a hero that was a leper-and a Samaritan one at that being commended by Jesus-Lk 17:18. And speaking of a hero that turned out to be Samaritan, we can ask, "Who alone among all Luke's parable characters is the only one to get the descriptive title 'good' by people (though Jesus doesn't use that word in the text, Jesus still commends the Samaritan's helping conduct)-- this hero is the Samaritan on the road -Luke 10:25-37). Another unlikely hero celebrated by Luke is a TAX collector Zachaeus whose converted generosity is greater than everyone's(Luke 19:8-9), with the exception of one more Lukan hero, my favorite, the most generous widow to the Temple treasury, offering her two cents that Jesus commends above all! (Lk 21:1-4).

Overall, as a group it seems that Luke's Jesus has widows as the highest on His list of heroes that He celebrates (Luke mentions widows 12 times in his works-more than the other three gospels) Jesus admires their courage & strong faith.

Luke's gospel starts with the faithful daily-praying, temple prophetess Anna (Lk 2:37) and he has Jesus celebrate the Widow of Zarephath in His earliest mission statement (Lk 4:25-6--from the OT Elijah saga who fed/protected him 1 Kings 17:8-16) Luke includes the spunky widow at the Temple Treasury I just mentioned that tossed back in her whole week's ration from the Temple-likely as protest-Lk 21:3) and of course the strong, persistent widow in the parable that He tells today. So, absolutely, widows figure prominently in Luke's understanding of faith in action.

What deep faith she demonstrates! She is a strong, courageous, and persistent widow, who doesn't take NO, for answer, when it comes to justice. She doesn't take being ignored either! She keeps showing up, making her appeal to the judge day after day, never getting discouraged but simply keeping at it!

Imagine her situation – It is not that she is going to the courthouse to meet her lawyer and sit with him to make the case. And there's no public prosecutor who pro bono, steps up to seek redress for victimized citizens. No, she has to be her own advocate. Has to be! No one stands up for her. Yet, she knows what is right and what has been done to her is wrong. Interestingly, we never hear the exact nature of the crime against her. But, I would suggest that since Jesus, later in

Luke 20:47, will condemn scribes for the exploitation of widows (Jesus says there, “They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers”- which tells me they dress up in pretty words their ugly theft). The scribes’ crimes may not be just charging hefty costs for religious services, but more outrageously, since scribes were like notaries, they kept the records and controlled the documents, writing up the property deeds & estate titles to homes, & executed wills so they could add in their perpetual services-themselves the well-paid administrators!) Or maybe they outright sold off the properties to friends for pennies on the dollar, (or transferred them to judges-probably this case). But this widow knows she has been wronged, and she demands justice be served!

And this is where Jesus’ theme about persistence comes into play. God is always about more than we can imagine. God is concerned about bringing justice for this persistent widow, but knowing this judge affects, how many other widows and others, if God can bring him in line, too, then jackpot! Seeing such bigger pictures can help motivate us not to lose heart when we persist and persist and seemingly just keep getting turned away. Like the widow, we must trust, keep faith and keep making the case! God wants justice for this one widow, but God also wants to get the judge right. This makes me think that in Jesus’ telling, He is after the bigger fish of the judge, too. Not just this case! This story is about more than just the level of unethical lawyers. Yes, it is after the higher level of corrupt judges. Maybe I’ve been watching too many episodes of Law and Order, but Jesus wants to make a RICO (racketeering) case. Like police detectives who when building big cases, aren’t interested in only settling for pulling in the petty dime-dealing street corner dealers-No, they are after the suppliers and kingpins. Similarly here, Jesus is fishing for the whale – converting the corrupt judge.

The judge’s corruption is major – it is mentioned three times in this short passage, when Luke introduces him (Lk18:2) as ‘not fearing God or caring about any person’, then the judge himself will repeat it, boasting of his absolute power, (Lk 18:4), and finally Jesus himself will refer to judge as ‘dishonest’ in Luke 18:6. So, this parable is about more than the resolution of one widow’s complaint. I think we underestimate God’s design and work toward good overcoming evil if we only view the widow here. God will make her whole, but I think God is after the judge’s conversion too, and by the widow’s persistent witness to justice, God can use her simple yet faithful witness to touch the hardened heart of the corrupt judge. It’s not just the restoration of her property rights, or the return of her stolen inheritance following her husband’s death, that God wishes to accomplish, but through her solid witness to goodness (Matt 5:5 “Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth”) such powerhouses of prayer and purity, these virtuous souls storming heaven with wishes for justice, God can use to overcome evil by their goodness. God is touching the callous conscience of this corrupt judge, by this

widow's tenacity and sanctity. This is an example of the bigger fish that Jesus calls his disciples to catch. Remember when they joined his company at the seashore. Jesus told them, "You are fishermen", in Luke 5:10, Jesus adds "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be fishing men". There is always something greater going on with God. And God uses the unlikely to surprise our defenses. St Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:27, "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong..." It takes a powerless widow, to break through the closed heart of a jaded judge. Like mustard seed faith that moves mountains(Lk 17:6, Matt 17:20), this widow's purity can move mountains of injustice, simply by, showing up day after day to witness to truth and goodness. Her sanctity overcomes the judge's sins. Maybe we've been weary at times of working toward good, wondering "When might God turn this evil around?" Well, God knows. We, like the widow, need only to keep on keeping faith. May our faith be as strong in doing good as this widow's and our prayer be as persistent as hers, that good may come to us and to everyone.