

Luke: 18:1–8

From Catena Aurea:

1. And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;
2. Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:
3. And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.
4. And he would not for a while: but afterwards he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;
5. Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.
6. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.
7. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?
8. I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

THEOPHYLACT. Our Lord having spoken of the trials and dangers which were coming, adds immediately afterward their remedy, namely, constant and earnest prayer.

CHRYSOSTOM. He who hath redeemed thee, hath shewn thee what He would have thee do. He would have thee be instant in prayer, He would have thee ponder in thy heart the blessings thou art praying for, He would have thee ask and receive what His goodness is longing to impart. He never refuses His blessings to them that pray, but rather stirs men up by His mercy not to faint in praying. Gladly accept the Lord's encouragement: be willing to do what He commands, not to do what He forbids. Lastly, consider what a blessed privilege is granted thee, to talk with God in thy prayers, and make known to Him all thy wants, while He though not in words, yet by His mercy, answers thee, for He despiseth not petitions, He tires not but when thou art silent.

AUGUSTINE. (lib. ii. qu. 45.) Our Lord utters His parables, either for the sake of the comparison, as in the instance of the creditor, who when forgiving his two debtors all that they owed him was most loved by him who owed him most; or on account of the contrast, from which he draws his conclusion; as, for example, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith. So also here when he brings forward the case of the unjust judge.

THEOPHYLACT. We may observe, that irreverence towards man is a token of a greater degree of wickedness. For as many as fear not God, yet are restrained by their shame before men, are so far the less sinful; but when a man becomes reckless also of other men, the burden of his sins is greatly increased.

It follows, And there was a widow in that city.

AUGUSTINE. The widow may be said to resemble the Church, which appears desolate until the Lord shall come, who now secretly watches over her. But in the following words, And she came unto him, saying, Avenge me, &c. we are told the reason why the elect of God pray that they may be avenged; which we find also said of the martyrs in the Revelations of St. John, (Rev. 6:10.) though at the same time we are very plainly reminded to pray for our enemies and persecutors. This avenging of the righteous then we must understand to be, that the wicked may perish. And they perish in two ways, either by conversion to righteousness, or by punishment having lost the opportunity of conversion. Although, if all men were converted to God, there would still remain the devil to be condemned at the end of the world. And since the righteous are longing for this end to come, they are not unreasonably said to desire vengeance.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Or else; Whenever men inflict injury upon us, we must then think it a noble thing to be forgetful of the evil; but when they offend against the glory of God by taking up arms against the ministers of God's ordinance, we then approach God imploring His help, and loudly rebuking them who impugn His glory.

AUGUSTINE. (ut sup.) If then with the most unjust judge, the perseverance of the suppliant at length prevailed even to the fulfilment of her desire, how much more confident ought they to feel who cease not to pray to God, the Fountain of justice and mercy? And so it follows. And the Lord said, Hear what, &c.

THEOPHYLACT. As if He said, If perseverance could melt a judge defiled with every sin, how much more shall our prayers incline to mercy God the Father of all mercies! But some have given a more subtle

meaning to the parable, saying, that the widow is a soul that has put off the old man, (that is, the devil,) who is her adversary, because she approaches God, the righteous Judge, who neither fears (because He is God alone) nor regards man, for with God there is no respect of persons. Upon the widow then, or soul ever supplicating Him against the devil, God shews mercy, and is softened by her importunity. After having taught us that we must in the last days resort to prayer because of the dangers that are coming, our Lord adds, Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 115.) Our Lord speaks this of perfect faith, which is seldom found on earth. See how full the Church of God is; were there no faith, who would enter it? Were there perfect faith, who would not move mountains?

AUGUSTINE. (ut sup.) Our Lord adds this to shew, that when faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray then, we must have faith, and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer, and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives stedfastness to faith.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

18:1 Introduction

Not the Length of Prayer But Persistence.

Augustine: [The Lord] taught us to pray to receive this blessed life. He taught us not to pray with much speaking, as if we were more likely to be heard, the more words we use in our prayer. The Lord said, "He knows what is needful for us before we ask him." For this reason, it may seem strange, although he cautions us against much speaking, he still urges us to pray since he knows what is needful for us before we ask for it. He said, "We should always pray and not faint." He used the example of a certain widow who wished to be avenged of her adversary and petitioned an unjust judge so often that she made him listen to her. She made him listen not through any motive of justice or compassion, but through weariness of her insistence. In this way, we were to learn how surely the merciful and just God hears us when we pray without ceasing. The widow, because of her continual petition, could not be treated with contempt even by an unjust and wicked judge. Letter 130.

Those Who Pray Continually Have an Advocate with the Father.

Origen: He prays for those who pray and appeals with those who appeal. He does not, however, pray for servants who do not pray continuously through him. He will not be the Advocate with God for his own if they are not obedient to his instructions that they always should pray and not lose heart. It says, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they should always pray and not lose heart. In a certain city there was a judge, etc." ... Who would hesitate a moment to be persuaded to pray if he believes that the mouth of Jesus cannot lie, when he says, "Ask, and it will be given you ... for everyone who asks, receives"? On Prayer 10.2.

18:2–5 The Parable

The Persistence of the Widow.

Cyril of Alexandria: The present parable assures us God will bend his ear to those who offer him their prayers, not carelessly nor negligently but with earnestness and constancy. The constant coming of the oppressed widow conquered the unjust judge that did not fear God or have any shame. Even against his will, he granted her request. How will not he who loves mercy and hates iniquity, and who always gives his helping hand to those that love him, accept those who draw near to him day and night and avenge them as his elect? Commentary on Luke, Homily 119.

Persistent Prayer Transforms Iniquity and Wickedness into Mercy.

Ephrem the Syrian: How was that unjust judge immoral and wicked? How was the upright judge gracious and just? The first in his iniquity was not willing to vindicate the widow, and in his wickedness, he was not willing to put her mind at rest. The justice of God knows how to vindicate, and his grace discerns how to give life. The iniquity of this wicked judge was contrary to the justice of God, and the wickedness of this rebel was in opposition to the grace of the gentle One. His wickedness therefore was stubbornness, for it dared to go against the fear of God. His boldness was stubborn, for it refused the lowly person.

These two were stubborn, but persistent prayer was even more stubborn. The persistence of the widow humiliated both the iniquity that was rebelling against God and the boldness that was behaving arrogantly towards human beings. She subjected them to her will, so that they might provide her with a vindication over her adversary. Persistence transformed these two bitter branches, and they bore sweet fruit that

was against their nature. The iniquity of the judge brought about a righteous judgment and a just retribution for the falsely accused woman. His wickedness gave peace to the afflicted one, although iniquity does not know how to judge, and wickedness does not know how to give refreshment. Persistence forced these two evil and bitter branches to give good fruit against their nature. If we persist in prayer, we should be even more able to prevail on the grace and justice of God to give us fruit that agrees with their nature. Let justice vindicate us, and let grace refresh us. Accordingly, the fruit of justice is the just reward of the oppressed, while the giving of refreshment to the afflicted is the fruit of grace. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 16.16.

18:6–8 The Interpretation

Not an Allegorical Representation of God.

Augustine: These examples now are proposed so that important things may be suggested from things of less importance. They are like the example of the judge who feared neither God nor people and who nevertheless yielded to the widow bothering him to judge her case. He yielded not through piety or kindness but through fear of suffering annoyance. By no means does that unjust judge furnish an allegorical representation of God. The example is of an unjust man who, although he yields for the mere sake of avoiding annoyance, nevertheless cannot disregard those who bother him with continual pleadings. By this the Lord wishes us to infer how much care God bestows on those who beseech him, for God is both just and good. Sermon on the Mount 15.

God Vindicates Us Against Satan's Attacks.

Martyrius (Editor: Hellenic for Sahdona): As our Savior pointed out, even the cruel and wicked judge eventually looked into the poor widow's case because she had wearied him with her insistence. It is quite clear that God does not neglect us. Even if he makes us wait, he will nonetheless answer us and see to our case all of a sudden. When we pray all the time, we should not weary. We should eagerly cry out to him day and night, begging him with a broken heart and a humble spirit. "A humble spirit is a sacrifice to God, and God will not reject a broken heart." Book of Perfection 75.

The Incarnate Word of God Avenges Us.

Cyril of Alexandria: We say in our prayers to him who is able to save and drive away from us that wicked being, "Avenge me of my adversary." The only-begotten Word of God has truly done this by having become man. He has ejected the ruler of this world from his tyranny over us and has delivered and saved us and put us under the yoke of his kingdom. It is excellent to make requests through constant prayer, because Christ will receive our pleas and fulfill our petitions. Commentary on Luke, Homily 119.

Will the Son of Man Find Faith.

Cyril of Alexandria: People sell the word of righteousness and make many abandon sound faith. They involve them in the inventions of devilish error. As Scripture says, they belch things out of their own hearts and not out of the mouth of the Lord. He foretold this saying, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" It did not escape his knowledge. How could it, since he is God, who knows all things? In his own words, he tells us that the love of many will grow cold. In the end times, some will depart from a correct and blameless faith. They will be going after seducing spirits and listening to the false words of people who have a seared conscience. Against these, we come near to God as faithful servants, begging him that their wickedness and their attempts against his glory may have no effect. Commentary on Luke, Homily 119.