

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 20, 2019
Reflection by Sister Susan Quaintance, OSB
EX 17:8-13; 2 TM 3:14-4:2; LK 18:1-8

One of the most important things I learned in grad school – it may have been in a class on the Rule but it also could have been in a scripture class – is the truth that if an author lays down a rule, we can be sure that those being written for were doing just the opposite. In other words, Benedict made rules about the proper amount of food and drink, for example, because some in the community were eating or drinking too much. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures we hear warnings against idolatry, indicating that the Hebrews were worshipping idols. Rules are rarely abstractions; they're usually responses to real-life issues. Today's gospel is an excellent example of that truth: both for Jesus' disciples and us.

Throughout October the Sunday lectionary has had us considering faith through the lens of the gospel of Luke. Two Sundays ago, we heard Jesus say that faith the size of a mustard seed is sufficient: this in reply to the disciples' plea to "Increase our faith." Last week Jesus told the one Samaritan leper who came back to say thank you for being healed: "Your faith has saved you." Commentaries and homilists have made sure that we noticed the fact that, in Luke, Jesus is doing all this teaching on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to crucifixion and death. Both the words and the actions are showing us what following Jesus is all about.

What lies between last Sunday's story about the ten lepers and today's about the importunate widow is a section on the Kingdom of God and the parousia. Right after the lepers Jesus tells the disciples what the coming of the Son of Man will be like and how they should behave when it does. We can infer that the people for whom Luke was writing – Christians living in Asia Minor (Turkey) or Antioch (Syria) late in the first century, who were more Gentile than Jewish – were anxious about the

second coming. They had never known the human Jesus but had been taught that he would return. So, when? Why has it not happened yet?

The Lucan author presents Jesus telling today's story (which only appears in this gospel). We don't have to be scripture scholars to understand that the theme of the story is perseverance in prayer or that this annoyingly tenacious widow is held up as a model for the average believer. Keep at it, the story assures. If this jerk of a judge finally gives in and grants the woman her due, surely our loving and gracious God will do the same for you.

It's a really good story for us, too. Loss of faith can be haunting and discouraging and real. At least, for me. Maybe a person loses faith in God because, despite praying and praying for relief from illness, the suffering only gets worse. Maybe someone loses faith in a church whose sins sometimes seem to go unrepented. Maybe someone else loses faith in a country that celebrates being "a nation of immigrants," while allowing fewer and fewer people into the country every day. Maybe a person loses faith in the gift of community when it grows small and tired and old. Maybe someone loses faith when profound loss – of a person or relationship or job or identity – hollows him out. Maybe one loses faith in herself when, despite attempts to be otherwise, she continues to be deeply flawed and habitually sinful. Maybe those people are me. Or you. Or the person sitting next to you.

So it's a really good story because we are told to be like this troublesome woman. She claimed her right to ask for what she was due and to keep asking when she didn't get it. She wanted acknowledgement, assistance, justice. She did not stop asking until she got them. May we pray for – and receive – that kind of tenacity and conviction and unwillingness to settle. *That* kind of faith. Amen.