

Fr. O'Connor's Homily for 19 October 2025
Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

Exodus 17: 8-13
2 Timothy 3: 14 - 4: 2
Luke 18: 1-8

Four weeks ago [*21 September 2025: Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C*] I offered an alternative interpretation of a parable that Jesus told about “a dishonest steward with a cast of rascal characters.” And I introduced you to an ancient writing style called “**the trickster tales.**” They are stories that, for the moment, neatly reverse the accepted power structures: like kings who fall, and their subjects who rise.

We have another such parable today about “an unjust judge and a persistent widow.” The traditional interpretation uses this parable to teach about the necessity “to pray always without becoming weary.”

In the traditional interpretation, the unjust judge represents worldly injustice. He is a self-centered figure who “neither feared God nor respected any human being.” This judge grants the persistent widow’s request only to stop her from bothering him.

The widow represents believers. She is poor and powerless. Her persistence in crying out for justice is a model for how believers should tirelessly petition God in prayer and not lose heart.

But God is not at all like the unjust judge. This is not a parable of similarity but a parable of contrast. If an unjust judge is willing to give a just judgment **because of someone’s persistence**, how much more so will our Heavenly Father be willing to answer our prayers **because He loves us?**

But here is another interpretation that flips the identities in this parable, like “the trickster tales” do. It focuses on God’s divine advocacy for justice. In this alternative interpretation, God is the persistent widow, and the unjust judge represents corrupt earthly powers that block the paths to justice.

The disciples who heard Jesus tell this parable would have known judges like this. To get a fair judgment from this kind of judge, a person needed to bribe them. Judges like this were called “robber judges.” They were described as “willing to pervert justice for a plate of meat.”

The “trickster part” comes with the widow. Poor widows were at the bottom of society. The best that a poor widow could hope for was to beg on the streets or

to collect the left-behind grain in the fields that was not fit to sell. Poor widows were not even allowed to speak to a judge in public. Yet this widow comes face-to-face with this judge so regularly that she wears him down. The Greek text accurately says that she might “give the judge a black eye with her persistence.”

The funny part is that this kind of encounter between a judge and a poor widow would never have happened in Jesus’ day. It is such an absurd idea. It is like a six-year-old entering the professional football field, taking the place of our Browns quarterback, and throwing a touchdown pass that beats the Steelers. It is so absurd that it is laughable.

And yet, here is this persistent widow wearing down this unjust judge and causing him to give her a just decision.

So, who is the opposite of the unjust judge in this parable? There is one character who is opposite in every way: who is powerless, who is deeply concerned with justice, and who is quick to act. And that is the widow.

If we are only able picture God as authoritative and domineering, then we would never expect a widow-like God.

But consider who is telling the parable: the one who was born in a manger, who was raised by dirt-poor parents, the one who is now an itinerant teacher, the one who has twelve unpolished followers at His side. The very one who would be arrested, tried and executed as a common criminal on a cross.

Is not Jesus Christ very much like the persistent widow and not at all like the unjust judge?

With this alternative interpretation, what can we learn?

In Christ, God is a widow-like character who chooses to lay aside power and might to walk with the lowly.

God is not like the judge who will only hear our cries if they are loud enough.

God is not like the judge, who has no respect for any human being.

God in Christ is like the widow who comes to us humbly from the poor in society.

God in Christ shows us, in trickster-tale parables, a Kingdom-world where the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

God is not only the one granting justice, but is also the one seeking justice.

God is not only listening to our cries, but is also crying out to us to seek His Kingdom, right here and right now.

God is the one who meets us in the humble Christ.

And who overturns injustice into justice, brokenness into healing, sin into forgiveness, and death into life.

Today in this parable, God shows Himself to us in a way that we would never have expected.

God shows Himself to us in the Christ-like persistent widow, who comes in humble surroundings, to turn our self-centered world upside down.

So to Him, who is like the persistent widow, “Pray always without becoming weary.”

For, the parable encourages us, this is the kind of God that we serve.