

**GOD WILL GIVE JUSTICE TO HIS ELECT – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Lk 18.1-8**

***At that time Jesus told a parable to his disciples to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.***

***And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.***

***And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?, Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"***

Luke's gospel chapter 18 opens with a teaching of Jesus that is not about prayer, but faith. Not a constant prayer, but faith. What does faith mean? To have faith, to believe profoundly, that God realizes his project. What is God's project? His Kingdom. On the subject of prayer, in chapter 12, Jesus had already spoken extensively to his disciples. He had presented God as a Father that takes care of his children, a Father who does not meet their needs, but actually precedes them. A Father that, as Jesus had said, knows of their needs.

Therefore there is no necessity to list our needs, because the Father already knows them. And Jesus concluding this teaching on prayer, had said *"Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."* ( Luke 12 ,31)

The Kingdom is the object of pray. So much so that Jesus puts in the request in the Lord's Prayer - "Thy kingdom come." What is the Kingdom? An alternative society. So this reading that we hear now – chapter 18 the first eight verses of Luke's gospel – is not a teaching on the insistence of prayer towards a God who is deaf and must be supplicated. This is the God of the gentiles, not the Father of Jesus.

It is a teaching on the certainty of God's promises that are made, even though it may seem otherwise. The evangelist writes: *".. he told them..,"* so Jesus is talking to the disciples, these disciples who have

been shown to have a minimum of this faith, “.. a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” The teaching is not about prayer, prayer is a means, but the teaching is about justice.

In fact the word justice in this gospel appears for a good four times. It is the justice of the Kingdom, this alternative society that Jesus comes to propose.

*“In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.”* The picture that Jesus makes of the judge is that of a powerful and proud person. It reminds us at once of the announcement that Mary had made in this gospel with her song, of that which is the plan of God for creation, but that project, to be realized, needs the cooperation of the people. Mary had said that God had scattered the proud, cast down the mighty from their thrones – and here we have the powerful that is proud - exalted the lowly, the hungry filled with good things, sends the rich away empty. This is God’s project. And it is on this trust that Jesus insists. It is this faith that his disciples must have and for this they must take action themselves and work together.

*“And there was a widow in that city..”* The image of a widow in the Bible represents the person that, not having a man to look after her, is at the mercy of all, is a marginalized person, without protection and the most needy. . And God in the Bible is called "the defender of widows", because God cares about these creatures who are marginalized. *“.. who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’”*

Here for the first time appears the word justice, that will appear a good four times in this reading.

*“For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God..”* here he acknowledges that he does not fear God *“..nor respect man,”* the picture that Jesus makes of the powerful, is atrocious, *“..yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”* Literally, she is ruining his reputation.

*“And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says.”* This is an invitation to his disciples. And here is Jesus’ lesson. *“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?”*( to cry night and day, in the psalms in the Old Testament, is the cry of the oppressed) *“Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.”* So, Jesus guarantees that this project of God’s for humanity, the Kingdom, an alternative society where the false values, of possession and commanding, are opposed to the right values, those that create fraternity, that is, sharing and serving. This is the Kingdom of God, the alternative society. Jesus assures that this will be realized. But to do so the disciples must collaborate with him breaking with these false values of society. If they do not the Kingdom cannot be realized.

Here is why Jesus concludes with an expression that seems full of bitterness. *“..when the Son of Man comes,”* The Son of Man, Jesus, comes with the destruction of Jerusalem. When Jerusalem is destroyed then there will be the announcement of the coming of the Son of Man *“..will he find faith on earth?”* He will in fact not find it. Luke’s gospel finishes bitterly with the disciples that, despite all Jesus’ teachings, despite all that Jesus had said, they continue to frequent the temple.

That den of thieves that Jesus had denounced and of which had denounced the destruction, for the disciples it still holds a value, they have not broken with the past, with the institution and the power. So, if one does not break away from this, the Kingdom of God, this alternative society cannot emerge.