

**WILL NOT GOD GIVE JUSTICE TO HIS ELECT,WHO CRY TO HIM – Biblical  
Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Luke 18,1-8**

*And he told them a parable 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?"*

Chapter 18 of Luke's Gospel opens with a teaching of Jesus that does not concern prayer, but faith. Not an insistent prayer, but faith. What does faith mean? Trust and to believe deeply, that God carries out his project. And what is God's project? His kingdom. On prayer Jesus already in chapter 12 and others had widely spoken to his disciples, he had presented God as a Father who takes care of the good of his children, a Father who does not meet their needs but actually precedes them. A Father who, as Jesus had said, knows what you need.

So there is no need to list our requests, because the Father already knows them. And Jesus, concluding this teaching on prayer, had said "*.. seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*" (Matthew 6,33)

The kingdom is the object of prayer. So much so that Jesus in the prayer of the Our Father will insert it with the request "Let your kingdom come". What is this kingdom? An alternative society. Then this passage that we now read - chapter 18 the first eight verses of the Gospel of Luke - is not a teaching on the insistence of prayer towards a God who is deaf and should be supplicated. This is the God of the pagans, he is not the Father of Jesus.

It is a teaching on the certainty of God's promises that are realized, even if on the contrary it may seem the opposite. The evangelist writes: "*.. he told them..*" therefore Jesus is addressing the disciples, these disciples who have shown that they do not have a minimum of this trust "*.. a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*" Here the teaching is not about prayer, prayer is a means, but the teaching is about justice.

In fact the term justice in this gospel will appear as many as four times. It is the justice of the kingdom, this alternative society that Jesus came to propose.

"*In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man*". The portrait that Jesus makes of the judge is that of a powerful and superb person. And we are immediately reminded

of the announcement that Mary made in this gospel with her song, of what God's plan for creation is, but a project that, in order to be fulfilled, needs the collaboration of people. Mary had said that God dispersed the proud and overthrew the powerful from their thrones - and here we have someone powerful who is proud - raised the humble, filled the hungry with goods, sent the rich back empty-handed. This is God's plan. And it is on this trust that Jesus insists. This is the faith that his disciples must have and for which they must work and collaborate.

*"And there was a widow in that city."* The image of a widow in the Bible represents the person who, not having a man who thinks of her, is at the mercy of all, is the marginalized person, without protection, 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, which will appear four times in this passage.*

*"For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God ...'" here he realizes he does not fear God, "...nor respect man,..." the image 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 'a pain in the neck' because it damages my reputation.

*"And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says."* And it is an invitation to his disciples. And here is the lesson that Jesus gives. *".. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? (crying day and night in the psalms of the Old Testament is an image of the cry of the oppressed) Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily."* Therefore Jesus guarantees that God's project for humanity, the kingdom, an alternative society where the right values, those that create fraternity, that is sharing, are set against the false values of having, of commanding and being served. This is the kingdom of God, the alternative society. Jesus ensures that this will be realized. But to do this, his disciples must work with him, breaking with these false values of society. If they do not, this realm cannot be realized. This is why Jesus then concludes with an expression that seems to be full of bitterness, *"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes,..."* The Son of Man, that is Jesus, comes with the destruction of Jerusalem. When Jerusalem is destroyed, the coming of the Son of Man is announced. *"..will he find faith on earth?"*

And in fact he doesn't find it. The Gospel of Luke ends bitterly with the disciples who, despite all the teaching of Jesus, despite all that Jesus had said, still continue to attend the temple.

That den of thieves that Jesus had denounced and whose destruction he had announced, for the disciples it still represents a value, that is, they have not broken with the past, with the institution and power. And so if they do not breakaway from this, the kingdom of God, this alternative society, cannot emerge.