

Sermon: 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 18:1-8 (v.1) The Parable of the Persistent Widow

Theme: Persistent Prayer in face (view) of the end

Goal: Always pray and never give up.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Prayers – There are so many different ways to pray. Some churches have overnight prayers. Others form a chain of prayer for special needs. Some pray loud with shouting. Others prefer silent prayers ... In the Lutheran service usually it is only the pastor who offers the prayers. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray; and He taught them the Lord's Prayer. The Apostles prayed as reported in the Book of Acts ^(4:31) and "the place where they were meeting was shaken"!

In the parable for today Jesus teaches us that we "should pray and not give up".

I – Why do we pray?

A prayer is a talk of a child with His Father. Whose child never asks his daddy for something? or tells him what had happened in the school or when he was playing with his friends? God invites us to talk to Him like a child talks to his father, and even commands us to ask Him for what we need. If we don't talk to our father, something is not well in our relationship...

Jesus gave us the confidence to approach our heavenly Father without fear. Since Jesus reconciled us to God by His sacrifice on the cross, we are not enemies anymore, but beloved children. He taught us to call God as "Our Father who art in heaven..." Everyone who believes in Jesus has this confidence. The Apostle John affirms: "This

is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14).

Many are the promises of God to hear our prayers. It is a privilege of the Christians to talk to our God and Father. Non-Christians offer their prayers as well, each of them to their own god. But the prayer cannot reach the deity because they don't exist. 1 Kings tells us about Prophet Elijah and the priests of the false god Baal. The priests were calling their god the entire day, and they didn't receive any answer. When Elijah called the true God of Israel, his prayer was answered in a marvellous way!

II – Why does God delay the answer?

But one question bothers many Christians: Why does God not answer immediately our prayers? We are so eager to receive what we pray for! Especially in extreme situations when we persist in prayers and even cry to God in prayers, it seems that He is slow in answering. Why? *Why does God allow people to despair, be broken-hearted? Why does God allow people to suffer like this at all? We have to admit that many things that we experience appear to contradict the idea that God is a loving God. At times He seems more like a hidden, fearsome God.*

The point here is that the way into faith leads through the darkest hours of temptations, which leave no room for self-confidence. Such doubt and temptation teaches us not only to know and to understand but also to experience how sweet, how lovely and how comforting God's Word is. God makes us aware of how extreme are the conditions in which people exist and from which they have to be saved. Hearing the cry of His people, God changes their situation, offering eternal salvation. (ABC 1238, 1239).

Even Jesus had to pass through suffering. And He used to pray a lot! God has His purpose and we don't know it now. Once we will have the answer. Is it hard? Yes, it is hard! But remember when you were a child at home with your parents: you didn't get everything you asked for. And this gave you lots of experiences: Or you had to work by yourself to get it (it didn't fall from heaven); or you had to wait till the right time. You cannot plant a seed today and go tomorrow and harvest it's crop. You have to wait and have persistence to have a good harvest.

We have an interesting vision about patience and perseverance in the Book of Revelation. John witnesses: "I saw under the altar (in heaven) the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been." (Revelation 6:9-11). Even the martyrdom of many Christians is in the plans of God to take them to heaven.

III – Persistence

This is the main point of the Parable: Persistence. The widow was totally helpless. But she didn't give up. And eventually she got what she was pleading for with the judge. Jesus' promise is sure: "And will not God bring justice for His chosen ones, who cry to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly."

I had a recent experience about persistence in prayer. I was praying for something every day for more than one and half year. It was on

my daily prayer list. When I updated my list in September, I took that item out. I was tired of praying for this and hopeless... That week I got what I was praying for! God gave me a big lesson: NEVER GIVE UP!

IV - Prayer in view of the end

But there is another lesson in this text. Jesus was talking about “The coming of the Kingdom of God” just before He told this parable. He was warning that many would not be prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus, worried about many earthly and daily issues – not necessarily bad issues. Faith was put in a second or third place in their list of priorities. Then Jesus told this Parable of the Persistent Widow, and finished this parable with an intriguing question: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Will people persevere in true faith and in prayer in spite of the difficult time at the end of the history? This is a question that each of us have to answer to himself and before God. Do we have persistence and perseverance even when our prayers are not answered as we want? Is our faith in God through Jesus Christ strong enough to surpass this kind of temptation? *A period of spiritual decline and persecution is assumed – a time that will require perseverance as the widow demonstrated* (CSSB 1584).

Conclusion: God is aware of our weaknesses and of the temptations that assault us. He gives us the weapons to fight against temptations and the strength to encourage us to remain faithful to Him. He speaks to our heart and to our mind in His Holy Word, comforting and calming us in our distresses. He renews His fellowship with each of us in the Holy Communion, - in the body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. He gives us much more than we ask for... just think about what you receive daily without asking for. These are signs of

God's lovely presence in our lives. Just believe, persevere – and wait... Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 20 October 2013