

Homily for the Twenty-Ninth Sunday of the Year
10-16-16
St. Mary Church, Vacaville, CA

Jesus' presented a poignant parable to his disciples in the gospel today (Lk. 18.1-8). A judge, whom Jesus described as dishonest, puts up with the persistent pleading of a widow. The judge said of himself that he did not fear God nor respected anyone.

Two additional details make this story even more difficult. A woman was bringing the case. In the times of Jesus, it was very probable that a woman had little, if any, standing in court. Certainly she had less standing than a man. She was also a widow, meaning there was no male spouse who could speak on her behalf. Jesus gave no indication of the nature of her case. If her adversary was a man then her situation was even more desperate. Without excusing the heartless judge, he may have had both the law and custom on his side.

In this light, the persistence of the widow is remarkable. She eventually wore down the callous court official, who in the end admitted that her cause was just.

Jesus told this parable to instruct the disciples on the necessity to remain steadfast in prayer. His example also highlighted the persistent dignity of the human person, above the

laws and customs governing one's standing in society. The widow did not cower or relent but remained steadfast in her cause, confident of her own dignity.

The topic of the treatment of women in society has been much debated in the media over the last two weeks. Putting aside the partisan bickering looking for political advantage, we should see beyond the headlines to the persistent problems regarding the dignity of women as well as social standing of others in our society.

Domestic violence against women is still too common. The increasing prevalence of pornography denigrates women. The ease with which young people access pornography contributes to a notion that this distorted image of women is normal. Many women face problems in the workplace. Many young women face pressures in school to conform to unhealthy social mores.

Much of this is publically debated with terms and a tenor that is not our own. We may be inclined to accommodate a logic that is very ideological, individualistic and legalistic forgetting that we have a tradition of wisdom that recognizes the dignity of women and men made in the image of God. This reflection of the divine in each person, man or woman, makes reverence the manner with which we should regard one another. We have an

understanding of the complementary relationship between genders which commands mutual respect and support. We are all stewards and guardians, each for the other, of the common dignity given to us by our creator.

The disciples of Jesus, therefore, should promote the dignity of women as well as others whose place in society is threatened. The unborn are already a part of us, no matter how fragile their existence. The demeaning of another should never be the basis for claiming one's own right or dignity.

Our Catholic sense of human dignity also informs us about other pressing social issues as well. The continuing social unrest in many communities across the country reminds that racism is still a deep national wound in need of healing. The mentally-ill homeless should not be regarded with indifference or disgust. These, our brothers and sisters, insistently plead a hearing with us.

We learn all this from Jesus. Today's gospel as well as the words of Paul in the second reading (II Tim. 3.14-4.2) remind us to be persistent in speaking for the dignity of others and actively working to protect those who are demeaned or discarded by society. The Apostle Paul strongly urged his co-worker, Timothy: "Proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or

inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.”

Persistence in prayer is needed if we are to put into practice Paul’s words. The current times can make the gospel seem very inconvenient. No matter the outcome of this election, the campaign begun by Pope Francis’s Jubilee Year of Mercy is unending and urgent. God always heeds us. In this alone we place our trust.

Like Moses in the midst of battle we must remain persistent in prayer so that we do not lose sight of His just and joyful cause, or lack in the mercy God gives to those whom He has chosen as His own.