

**Reflection on the Gospel-29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C  
(Luke 18:1-8)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel begins with a reference to prayer, a favourite theme in Luke, and ends with a question about faith. If the parable were also about prayer, as the narrator suggests, then the unjust judge would image a God who has no respect for anyone and is slow to hear the cry of the poor! There are clearly problems with this, and scholars are divided on how to explain it. The most likely explanation is that, in the editorial process, the gospel writer has made three key additions to the story: the introductory statement that Jesus told them a parable "about the need to pray always"; the final instruction to pay attention to the judge's words; and the three questions at the end. The original parable was almost certainly told in another context and probably ended with the words of the judge. What difference might this make for us as 21<sup>st</sup> century readers? The parable has acquired different meanings as it shifted from an oral to a written context. The Lukan author fits the parable rather awkwardly to the issues he wants to address with his communities.

The scene for the verses representing the original parable is "a certain city", possibly suggesting that it is a story for any and every city. There are two main human characters, the judge and the widow. There is another non-speaking character in the wings, namely the widow's opponent. The hearer or reader is invited to fill the gaps. Who is this opponent? What sort of injustice is the widow experiencing? Since the judge clearly recognises the validity of the widow's claim, why does he refuse to hear her plea? Is it because he is accepting bribes from the woman's adversary? What sort of judge would admit to having no respect for anyone, even to himself?

A vital clue to understanding the parable lies in the translation of the final words of the judge. It literally reads: "so that she won't finish up giving me a black eye". Translators have consistently softened the impact of this with a metaphorical reading. Is Jesus drawing attention to the plight of widows in that society who can only get justice from a corrupt judiciary if they resort to violence? The widow in this story is one feisty woman: without the support of a husband or the benefit of social security payments, she has only her own personal resources to rely upon. The judge operates from the assumption that she is prepared to use her fists. A system that provides no other recourse for the vulnerable of the human community and for those endeavouring to save our endangered planet simply has to change. Jesus tells his hearers to pay attention to what the "unjust judge" has to say. It is not at all clear what the reader is meant to take from this story. One possibility is that those who seem to have little power can win out in the end if they have the courage to persist in their struggles for justice.

*Luke 18:1-8 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later*

*he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And Jesus said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Human One comes, will he find faith on earth?"*