

Reflection for the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today in our Gospel reading taken from the Gospel of Luke, we hear of a widow who is seeking justice from a Judge, who is not honest. In the end this dishonest Judge does the right thing because the widow keeps asking him for justice. He does not choose justice because it is the right thing to do, rather, he decides to embrace justice because of her determination. Jesus' point of the parable, that He shares with His disciples, might be interpreted as stating that is if a dishonest Judge will do the right thing because he is continually asked to render a just verdict, we can conclude that if we continue to pray to our loving and just God, He will respond to our request. This explanation of our Sunday Gospel reading might be problematic, for we seem to be seeing God as the wish giver, we ask and he gives. This picture of God seems to be a little undeveloped and simplistic. It is important to note that the widow in the parable this Sunday is looking for not a ruling in her favor, but a just ruling.

Reflecting on our Gospel this Sunday with a parable about the widow who is very determined to seek justice, I find myself wondering why people do the right thing. Normally I would think we as individuals, and as a community, do the right thing because of our faith and how we chose to live a righteous and moral life. But our Gospel reading brings up the idea that there could be several reasons for doing the right thing.

In 2015 there was a study conducted in France with the goal of determining why people do the right thing. The study concluded that most people do the right thing due to expectations of society, or peer pressure. The result of this study appears fits with our Gospel reading this Sunday about the dishonest Judge who did the right thing for the widow. He chose a just verdict in the widow's case because he lived within the same community and society as she did and doing the right thing was good for him and for society. The dishonest Judge did not choose to do the right thing because of his faith or some moral code. So maybe the 2015 study conducted in France is correct we as a people and individuals do the right thing due to expectations of society. But what about people that help with natural disasters that live thousands of miles from where the disaster happened and even in a different country, it would seem the social aspect of helping would not be there, nor would there be peer pressure. People clearly help others in times of need and help with no connection to them, they just help. What is their reason, to help others with no social or community ties? I would assume that people who help others in distant lands and places, help because of a belief system or a moral code, it is simply the right thing to do.

Our first and second readings this Sunday might provide some help in understanding what motivates people to do good and help others in need. At first glance these two readings might appear to have nothing in common with each other, or the Gospel reading. The first reading taken from the Book of Exodus speaks of a battle that the nation of Israel has with Amalek, and how God helped His people win the war that Amalek had started with Israel. Over time the Amalekites have come to represent the archetypal enemy to the Jewish people, and a symbol of evil. In 1895 Hugo Winckler suggested due to a lack of evidence in Egyptian and Assyrian records of a tribe or people called the Amalekites that the accounts of the Amalek nation in the Bible are mythological and ahistorical. That being the case, then account in Exodus of the nation of Israel fighting Amalek can be seen as the nation of Israel fighting evil. In our second reading this Sunday, from the Second Letter of St. Paul to Timothy, we hear of St. Paul reminding St. Timothy to keep the faith. St. Timothy from the time he was an infant has been steeped in the faith and call to follow Christ and share the faith with the whole world. Later in the Second Letter of St. Paul to Timothy, in chapter 4 verse 7 St. Paul writes "*I have competed well; I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" Both Old and New Testament readings this Sunday taken from the Book of Exodus and the Second Letter of St. Paul to Timothy point out that we have a challenge, a race to run, and battle to engage in, for we must share what is good and holy with the world. It is true that many people in the world strive to do what is right and good. As people of faith, we do what is right and good not just because it is what we should do for ourselves and society, we do it so share God's love with the world and to battle evil in the world. Knowing that God has created us in His image and likeness, maybe this is why we as humans tend to do good. We have been created to share what is good and right so that there will be less evil in the world.