

29th Sunday. 07

1. “Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.” I am not sure if that is or is not a phrase or axiom. And even if it is, the word hobgoblin is a bit mysterious for some of us. I thought I knew what it meant, but I looked it up to be sure. It has a number of meanings. One of them is a “spooky appearance.” So it is a Halloween word. In this phrase it would mean that consistency is what keeps small minds in check. They are afraid of being inconsistent. But those who use this phrase don’t see this as a good thing because they talk about small minds, and to say that someone has a small mind is not flattering. In other words, the phrase is saying that consistency is not an ideal for big minds, for great minds. They are willing to change; they are willing to grow. For them consistency is a vice, not a virtue. Consistency is only for the small-minded.

2. This phrase came to mind when I read today’s Gospel. True, it does not speak of consistency. But it speaks of something which seems to be very close to it: persistence. To be consistent is not to change. Persistence is something like that, but it emphasizes time. The persistent person is the one who does or says the same thing over a long period of time. And for today’s Gospel that is a virtue.

The widow in the Lord's parable persists in plaguing the evil judge. She will not relent. She is consistent and persistent. She keeps doing the same thing time and time again. And the judge gives in, even though he has no respect for God or man, because he is afraid that she is going to get so angry that she will give him a black eye. Yes, he is afraid that this woman is going to hit him.

3. This is what we should be like in our prayers, Jesus tells us. Be persistent! Don't give up! And if the woman succeeded because the judge was afraid, we will succeed because God is good and wants to give us what is good for us.

4. Why is it then that sometimes, even when we are persistent in prayer, our prayers seem to go unanswered? In those cases I think we have to say that God sees that what we have prayed for would not really help us. But I suspect that sometimes we can weaken even God, just as persistent children can weaken their parents so that they give them something which they don't think will be the best thing for them. So too with God, I suspect. When we are so persistent, God may sometimes decide that we have to learn by our mistakes, and so He grants us what is not really our best option. But in the end he will write straight with our crooked lines by

bringing us to see—through our harsh experiences—that this was not really the best thing for us.

5. There is a sentence at the end of today's gospel which at first does not seem to be consistent with the rest of the text: "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" How does that fit in with the parable about persistence in prayer? I suggest that the link here is this. Prayer is the language of faith. Therefore, if there is no faith, there is no prayer. But if there is faith, then prayer and persistence in prayer will flourish. Therefore, by this last sentence Jesus is asking us if we still believe in and trust him. If we do, then when he comes, he will find us persistent in our prayer.