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God Will Vindicate His Chosen Ones

Biblical Reflection for 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

By Father Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, OCT. 12, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Luke depicts Jesus at prayer right from the beginning of the Gospel. Prayer becomes one of the ways by which we follow Jesus. Luke's story of Jesus begins in the context of Jewish prayer in the Temple at Jerusalem, when Zechariah is told that his prayer has been heard (1:13).

The texts of the Infancy Narrative are beautifully woven together around the prayers of Zechariah, Mary, Simeon, Anna, angels and shepherds. So many of the major moments of Jesus' life are linked with prayer occurring either before or after the events: at his baptism (3:21); before the choosing of the Twelve (6:12); at the Transfiguration, the Last Supper, and even unto death on the cross. In each prayerful moment, Jesus lives out the story of God's great dialogue with the human family by remaining totally open to the power of God.

Luke tells us that Jesus sometimes prayed all night (6:12), and some ancient texts say of his praying on the night of his arrest: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (22:44).

Luke insists on the importance of prayer for the Christian life. We must pray unceasingly, for prayer is a sign of our faith in God. Prayer is not something that we use to put pressure on God to get our own way. Authentic prayer opens us up to the action of God's Spirit, bringing us in line with God's desires, and making us into true disciples, obedient to Jesus and to the Father who has sent him.

Two parables on prayer

In today's Gospel, we find the first of two parables on prayer that conclude the Lukan travel narrative. It is most likely that the two parables existed separately and in other contexts. The first (18:1-8) teaches the disciples the need of persistent prayer so that they not fall victims to apostasy (v. 8). The second (18:9-14) condemns the self-righteous, critical attitude of the Pharisee and teaches that the fundamental attitude of the Christian disciple must be the recognition of sinfulness and complete dependence on God's graciousness.

Verses 2-5 and 10-13 are the parables proper. Luke has joined the two parables because they both deal with the subject of prayer. Yet on closer reading, it is evident that both parables are about God's vindication, i.e., God's upholding, justifying, exonerating and confirming.

According to the first parable, which is today's Gospel (18:1-8), God will soon vindicate his chosen ones, but in the second parable, it is not those who think of themselves as chosen or holy who are vindicated but those who confess they are sinners. This placing of seemingly contrasting stories back to back (vindication of holy ones/vindication of sinners) recalls a previous structure in Luke. In Chapter 7, Luke moved directly from a story about Jesus and "a woman of the city" to a report in Chapter 8 about Jesus and women who participated in his ministry (8:1-3). Again in Chapter 10, Luke joined two stories, one that said in effect "Go and do

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likewise" (the Good Samaritan) and the second story set in Bethany, "Sit quietly and listen to the Master" (Martha and Mary).

The judge and the widow

By means of the parable of the judge and the widow (an image of helplessness in that culture, easily victimized by the powerful), Jesus assures his followers that God "will vindicate them quickly" (18:8). This parable is very similar to the parable of the friend at midnight (11:5-8). As in the parable of the steward caught cheating, today's lesson involves a person not of commendable character. The movement of the parable is from the lesser to the greater: If a cruel judge will give way to the unrelenting pressure of the widow, how much more will God listen to the prayers of his holy ones?

Both parables in Luke 18 present prayer as continual and persistent, hurling its petitions against long periods of silence. Prayer means asking, seeking, knocking and waiting, boundless trust and patience. Those who pray sometimes become frustrated and angry that their supplications are not heard. Yet life in the Christian community is possible only through a life of prayer. The surprising thing about prayer is that its first effect is in us. Our own minds and hearts are shaped by prayer as we seek opportunities to translate that prayer into practice, the true test of its authenticity.

Six new exemplary models of holiness and prayer

At the times throughout history when the Church hits its low points, God raises up tremendous saints to bring the Church back to its real mission. It's almost as if in those times of darkness the light of Christ shines ever more brightly. We are living through one of those times, and the Lord continues to raise up exemplary models of holiness and prayer for the world. This Sunday, Benedict XVI will canonize six new saints in St. Peter's Square. The Gospel story of the day, which recounts the necessity of continual and persistent prayer, summarizes very well each of these remarkable individuals. The new saints are:

Blessed Mary MacKillop, 1842-1909, Australia's first saint and founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

Blessed Stanislaw Soltys Kazimierczyk, a Polish-born member of the Canons Regular of the Lateran, who lived 1433-1489. He was famous as a preacher and confessor.

Blessed Juana Josefa Cipitria Barriola of Spain, who died in 1912 and was the founder of the Daughters of Jesus.

Blessed Giulia Salzano, the Italian founder of the Catechetical Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who died in 1929.

Blessed Camilla Battista Varano, an Italian Poor Clare, who lived from 1458 to 1524.

Blessed André Bessette, Canadian Holy Cross Brother who was born into a poor, French Canadian family outside of Montreal on Aug. 9, 1845, and died in 1937 in Montreal.

Each of these holy women and men based their lives on God's Word, prayed unceasingly, immersed themselves in the liturgy of the Church, drew strength from the Eucharist and the sacraments, and put their devotion into practice through compassionate loving, gentle and shepherding, patient suffering, and generous service of the poor.

They allowed God's will to be done in their lives on a daily basis. The Lord worked through their doubts,

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strengths and human weaknesses to unite the Church. Their action on Jesus' behalf was all very positive, hopeful, courageous, and straightforward. Their active faith in him and their decisive following of him are the unchanging quintessence of the Church's vocation.

"At least he will know how to pray very well."

Allow me to pause for a moment on the life of Brother André. When the young postulant learned that his religious community was thinking of not allowing him to make his first profession, he sought out the bishop of Montreal and begged him to intercede with the Holy Cross superiors, saying, "My only ambition is to serve God in the most humble tasks."

The bishop was deeply moved by his plea. The superiors relented and admitted Alfred to vows as a consecrated brother of Holy Cross. On Feb. 2, 1874, Bessette's religious name, André, was conferred on him by his superiors. The novice master, upon accepting Brother André as a lay brother, wrote: "If this young man becomes incapable of working, at least he will know how to pray very well."

Brother André's vocation as a religious lay brother, and not an ordained priest, is a remarkable witness of fidelity to prayer and putting that prayer into action with the poor. Because he learned how to pray with fervor, persistence and joy as a child and young religious, Brother André was able to urge people to pray with confidence and perseverance, while remaining open to God's will.

He admonished people to begin their path to healing through commitments to faith and humility, through confession and a return to the sacraments. He encouraged the sick to seek a doctor's care. He saw value in suffering that is joined to the sufferings of Christ. He allowed himself to be fully present to the sadness of others but always retained a joyful nature and good humor. At times, he wept along with his visitors as they recounted their sorrows. As he became known as a miracle worker, Brother André insisted, "I am nothing ... only a tool in the hands of Providence, a lowly instrument at the service of St. Joseph."

As an adult, Brother André stood just five feet tall. But he was a giant of prayer, faith and spirituality, whose shadow still hovers mightily over Montreal and Canada. He shows us what can be achieved through faith and love. In the humble porter's own words, "It is with the smallest brushes that the artists paint the most beautiful pictures."

Because Brother André never ceased seeking, knocking and discerning God's will in his life, he was able to open the doors to his own heart and to the church for millions of people. In life he was Montreal's porter and now he is one of heaven's special gatekeepers. He teaches us the importance of greeting each person as the Lord himself.

Pope John Paul II once said of him, "We venerate in Blessed Brother André Bessette a man of prayer and a friend of the poor, a truly astonishing man. [...] In each age the Holy Spirit raises up such humble witnesses of the Gospel, who turn things topsy-turvy."

Like Aaron and Hur in the Book of Exodus, may Sts. Mary, Stanislaw, Juana Josefa, Giulia, Camilla and André support our hands and arms when we grow tired in prayer (Exodus 17:8-13), and help us to become friends of Jesus and faithful witnesses of the Gospel in our own day.

[The readings for 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time are Exodus 17:8-13; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2; Luke 18:1-8]

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