



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

*The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida*

**THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST**

OCTOBER 16, 2022

A Homily by the Rev. Jo P. Popham

“Being persistent in our faith”

I have been so moved by the brave women in Iran who have been burning their hijabs. The women – women of all ages – are protesting the wearing the compulsory head scarves. In September Iran’s “morality police” was responsible for the death of a 22 year old woman who had uncovered her hair. As of this past week the response by the police has resulted in more than 400 deaths and more than 20,000 arrests of protesters. Of course, this is not new. Women have borne the brunt of such policies. They have suffered four decades of oppression, and brutality, and violence. Who can blame them? Their slogan is “Women, life, liberty!” Are the women in Iran really oppressed? You bet they are! Are they the only group that the republic has targeted? Not by a long shot, but this is a feminist revolution! These courageous women are fighting back! I say courageous, not unlike the widow in today’s Gospel. The women of Iran are so suppressed, so beaten down, that the only way up is to fight back. Of course, it goes far beyond covering their hair. Every action of women in Iran is controlled by government – child custody, divorce laws, bodily autonomy, even the right to leave the country. So whether they are courageous or foolish, they have fought back the only way they can. They have been persistent. I pray for their movement to succeed, but moreover, for the violence to cease.

In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus taught his disciples to not give up. Widows had every reason to give up. In Jewish society a widow had no legal status; she was powerless. The judge did not respect the widow in the parable. Indeed twice Jesus said that the judge did not love God or anyone – except himself. He was a rogue and did not care about people or their needs. But even this judge eventually listened to the widow’s petition. This judge who did not even know a thing about mercy was beaten down by the persistence of the widow. She was completely powerless. She had nothing to lose. So she came to the judge again and again begging, no demanding, that he grant her

justice. She whined. She cajoled. She was insistent. She was not going to be deterred. She kept coming to the judge until he gave in. She was ready to make her appeal until he was beaten down. And finally, reluctantly, he granted her request, but only to get rid of her – to rid himself of the annoyance she had become to him. His decision was not based on justice. He did not give in based on mercy.

God cannot be compared to this amoral judge, except by contrast, because God heeds the petitions of his people – our petitions. God hears our prayers. And God is always available to us. But we do have to be steadfast in our prayers. We must have faith to be persistent in prayer until Jesus comes again. The first Christians thought that Christ’s return was imminent. Still Jesus’s followers had to have faith – not unlike the widow’s persistent faith – that their prayers would be answered, as we must.

When Jim presides, he leads us to into the confession by saying: “God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, he welcomes sinners and invites them to his table.”

God loves us. God is merciful. God is just. All the time. Not so much for the arbiter of disputes at the judge’s bench in the parable in the Gospel according to Luke that we heard this morning. Unlike Luke’s judge, God never gets weary of our petitions and prayers. Yes, we may have to wait, but all the while, we pray, we remain faithful in prayer.

I used to think myself selfish for praying, because of how prayer changes the one who is praying – how praying changes me – perhaps even more than the one being prayed for. Being faithful in prayer, being in touch with God, changes us as we offer up petitions for others. Does the one being prayed for feel those prayers. Absolutely, especially when many are praying together. But praying also teaches us who we are and whose we are.

This time of the year when we pray for a successful stewardship campaign, we remember whose we are. Yes, we pray for those who pledge to support the ministries of the church. Yet giving to God for God’s purposes to be fulfilled is different than just hoping for enough. Here at St. Andrew’s By-the-Sea, we know we are God’s and that we will have enough to fulfil God’s will for us. We know who we are because we know whose we are. And this year we pray to live as though we have more than enough.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.