

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 19-20, 2019

Readings: Exodus 17:8-13; 2 Timothy 3: 14-4:2; Luke 18:1-8

Preacher: Brigit Hurley

The widow in today's Gospel will not take "No" for an answer. She persists in her pursuit of justice, undeterred by the judge's disregard for her needs. We only see a glimpse of her as she stands before the powerful, unjust judge day after day. Jesus tells us little about her situation except that she required justice against her opponent.

It makes me wonder. Does she have a small group of friends or even a large group of activists (perhaps some raging grannies?) who support her behind the scenes? People who win great victories never do so alone. Rochester-area faith communities demonstrate that every October when we join our voices together to demand justice for our children during the Children's Sabbath.

This year we are seeking change to the system that provides therapies and services to young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Inadequate funding and provider shortages are forcing children to wait for occupational and physical therapists, speech language pathologists, teachers of the deaf and blind, feeding specialists, and other professionals who can change the trajectory of their lives if given the chance. Time is the enemy here, with 80 percent of brain development occurring before age 3, and up to 700 new neural connections being formed every second during those crucial early years.

Rochester-area mother Tina recalls her Early Intervention service coordinators informing her that her daughter Meredith would have to wait to receive services. She said, "Therapists are doing absolutely everything they can to get our children what they need, and yet many children are going without."

As scientists discover more about the amazing brain growth that happens in a child's preschool years, it's tempting to view the programs that support infants and toddlers as "investments." Young children in high quality Pre-K programs are less likely to need expensive Special Education programs in later grades. They go

on to have higher high school graduation rates and lower rates of criminal activity and teen pregnancy. Think of the tax dollars saved in the long run! What a terrific return on society's investment! As if a 4 year old owes us anything. As if we deserve payback for providing safe, developmentally appropriate experiences for children with special needs.

"Amelyia is a child who is working so far below her age level that being placed on a waitlist is awful especially since she is entitled to it. I wasn't willing to make her wait . . . to me waiting is NOT AN OPTION for her because every day is another day lost!"

It's not about saving tax dollars. It's about caring for the poor and vulnerable, and treating every person with dignity. It's about following a God who "will see to it that justice is done for them speedily." It's about seeking a just distribution of resources.

Adrienna's mother says, "We do not want to watch her struggle with communicating effectively due to the county not being able to provide the services they are supposed to. I can only imagine the other children who are awaiting needed services and what their families are going through and how helpless they must feel."

The Children's Sabbath is our chance to surround these children and families as they persistently petition for what is due to them. We can't leave them to do it alone. We must let our elected officials know that thousands of us are behind them. We must follow Jesus' instructions to his disciples and "always pray and not give up."

Meredith's mother is angry. "It's infuriating to see Meredith continue to struggle because of the lack of early intervention providers. She's furious too, but doesn't have the words to articulate her anger. I owe it to her to use my words to advocate for her rights as well as the rights of all the children in NYS who want to communicate but CAN'T. Meredith can't wait."