

**29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
October 21, 2007**

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**Many of you are aware that one of my special heroes is Charles Schulz, the creator of “Peanuts.” He is also one of my favorite theologians and appears with some frequency in my homilies. I am also sure that you have heard that, while he has been dead for seven years now, recently his name has been back in the headlines. The *New York Times* ran four successive stories last week, one on its front page. *NPR* radio featured Shultz on its Wednesday morning show. And even John Updike wrote a piece for the *New Yorker*.**

**All the attention stems from a new biography published last week that some have interpreted as portraying “a cold and bitter man.” Shultz himself commented in interviews throughout his life that he was often filled with melancholy and anxiety. Like his creation, Charlie Brown, Shultz told “60 Minutes” in 1999 that he frequently “had this awful feeling of impending doom,” and that he often woke up in a “funeral-like atmosphere.” Just like Charlie Brown, the rain cloud always followed him no matter where he walked.**

**But Shultz plodded on for 50 years determined to fulfill his childhood dream of becoming a great cartoonist someday. At its peak, the “Peanuts”**

**cartoon strip reached 300 million readers in 75 countries, in 2,600 papers and 21 different languages every day! He became, according to the *New York Times*, “one of the highest paid entertainers in the America”—right up there with Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jackson.**

**So why am I talking about him in a homily? Because our persistent widow reminded me of him this week. Like today’s widow, he was surely one of the most determined, persistent, and creative men to very the end of his life. That’s why I thought of him today. He had to be resolute and unrelenting in his quest just to be himself.**

**But there is another reason I thought of Shultz today. Our first reading from Exodus has itself a cartoon-like quality. There’s poor Moses standing on top of the rock, arms outstretched until he collapses. Then his two friends help him lift those arms back up again. And all to the end of having Amalek and his troops slaughtered below. Persistent? Yes. But hardly an edifying goal: the complete slaughter of your enemies. I’d love to see what the “Simpsons,” or better yet, “South Park,” would do with this scene!**

**But both readings are, finally, not only about persistence in prayer, but persistence in a special kind of prayer, a prayer for justice to be done. Today’s liturgy is a reminder about just how persistent human beings need to**

**be in the pursuit of justice for every brother and sister on earth. Justice in our everyday worlds. That's all the widow wants, justice. And that is, in the end, what even the corrupt judge cannot prevent. God's justice will and does prevail—but only because of our persistent efforts to create and shape that justice for ourselves and for those with whom we are privileged to walk in this life.**

**Our world, too, is a place of clear injustice, of segregation, hatred, bitterness, of war, of squandered wealth and unimaginable hunger at the same time. Both the widow and Charles Shultz experienced that. Life is not always fun, and faith is not always easy. As Shultz said of "Peanuts" toward the end of his life. "All the loves in the strip are unrequited; all the baseball games lost; all the test scores are D-minuses; the Great Pumpkin never comes; and the football is always pulled away." As Updike says in his commentary: "Peanuts' was a unique creation, a comic strip at bottom tragic."**

**So too is much of life for those who must live with injustice. The injustice that perhaps you and I create in small and seemingly insignificant ways. The injustice that our church sometimes nurtures. The injustice that creates and nourishes scapegoats for us, scapegoats of a different color, or race, or creed, or gender, or orientation, or economic status. The Gospel**

urges us all today to think of the injustice that we may too often not lift a finger to fight—right in our own backyards, let alone in our country and our world.

“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” That is the strange question asked by Jesus at the end of the gospel today. The faith Jesus is asking for is, to use the Jesuit phrasing, a faith that does justice. One without the other is pointless. Will the Son of Man find *that* faith? We are asked rather bluntly today to pray for justice without becoming weary, and to work for justice without becoming bored.

The image I wish to leave you with is one I used two weeks ago in another homily at the noon liturgy. On that day, the prophet Habbakkuk’s opening lines were: “How long, O Lord, how long, must I wait”—for justice to be done? Charles Schultz used those very words, in Latin no less, in one of his most famous strips.

Charlie Brown is once again just trying to kick the football for the extra point. Lucy always volunteers to hold the ball. And she always pulls it away at the last minute. But this time Charlie is sure justice will be done; she will not disappoint again! She holds the ball; he runs at it; she pulls the ball away again; he sits on his behind staring up to the heavens and recites the line from

**the prophet: “*Quam diu, Domine, quam diu?*” How long, O Lord, how long?**

**And Lucy rather smugly answers: “All your life, Charlie Brown. All your life?”**

**That is also how long God’s justice will wait for our persistent prayer and our determined action. All our lives! Think today of the persistent widow. Think of Moses with his arms aloft. But remember the football. And pray as if everything depended on just you. Sometimes it does.**