

Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 10-11, 2018

Readings: 1 Kings 17: 10-16; Hebrews 9: 24-28; Mark 12: 28-44

Preacher: Sr. Ruth Maier

There was this little boy who observed his Mom drop a dollar in the collection basket as it was passed at Mass. On the way home from Church that morning, the Mom complained about the boring, uninspiring homily. “But Mom,” said the little fellow, “what do you expect for a dollar?”

There was a little boy in Zarephath who observed his Mom using their last handful of flour and cup of oil to make bread for a stranger. He was afraid and so very hungry. His Mom had said that this was all they had and that they were going to die soon.

There was the Son of God sitting opposite the Temple treasury, who observed a poor widow putting two small coins, worth a few cents, into the treasury. He called to his disciples to tell them that she had put in more than all the others for she contributed from her poverty, she gave all she had.

Do we not know these women?

Have we not encountered them in our day:

- Elderly women who have little but are generous with what they have.
- Not so elderly women who struggle to care for their families.
- Women whose generosity and love brings beauty and comfort to our lives.

We may rarely notice them, but God notices them all the time. We know they are among God’s favorite people because widows get very good press in the Bible. They are always presented in a positive light.

You may recall:

- Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, who was willing to leave her homeland to accompany and support her mother-in-law and became an ancestor of Jesus.
- Anna, the prophetess living in the Temple, who recognizes the child Jesus, as told in the Gospel of Luke.
- The widow of Naim, about to bury her only son and Jesus raises him to life.
- The widow of Zarephath, remarkable for her hospitality and her trust in God, in today's reading from Kings.

What is so special about these women? Certainly it was not their situation. Widows were usually very poor in those days. There were no pensions, no social security. They had no social standing.

These women had suffered great losses in their lives, but they had come through their suffering with tremendous trust and faith in God.

Still they had the courage to place themselves in God's hands and to express that confidence and love by their actions. Their losses did not turn them into bitter people. On the contrary, their losses were instrumental in opening them to deeper realities.

It may be hard for us to imagine the tremendous courage and deep faith, these widows must have had. They gave up what they actually needed to live on! We could easily judge them as irresponsible and foolish.

But these stories teach us what Jesus expects of those who would follow him.

Jesus wishes us to identify with the faith and trust of this apparent "nobody" over the avaricious, arrogant, ambitious Scribes, Pharisees and wealthy temple-goers of the first few verses of today's Gospel.

This widow, who gives up everything she has in a daring act of trust in God's providence, mirrors for us the total offering of his life and good work

that Jesus will soon make to his Father for the “salvation of those who eagerly await him.”

What issues do these widows of Scripture raise for us?

- How have we dealt with losses in our own lives?
- Have they made us bitter, or have they brought us to a richness of spirit?
- Have they given us a more compassionate attitude?

There is something within us all that looks for solutions to our problem outside the realm of faith. We think we can solve our own problems, and conquer all obstacles by ourselves. As Americans, we are tempted to believe that the proper amount of cash applied in the right places can heal all ills.

But the message of today is that the followers of Jesus place their confidence, their trust, their hope and their faith in God rather than in material possessions.

These two widows, set before us today, gave from their substance. They gave all they had. They put their trust in God and by their actions shouted that God’s presence in their lives was infinitely more important than anything they owned. What they did seems extremely difficult for you and me, who can hardly imagine life without three meals a day, with snacks in between, a trip to the mall, heat in our home and gas in our car.

These two widows model for us the ideal Christian, the faithful follower who humbly trusts in God’s promise.