

HOMILY for 32ND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

Every time I read the two stories in this Sunday's Gospel & First Reading, I ask myself, "Why did those poor widows do that? Why did they give everything they had to God & people in need around them? Why did they put the needs of others before their own?" Here is Jesus' reaction to those poor widows: "...I want you [my disciples] to observe that this poor widow contributed more than all the others who donated to the [Temple] treasury. They gave from their surplus wealth, but she gave from her want, all that she had to live on." He continued, "Be on guard against the scribes, who like to parade around in their robes & accept marks of respect in public, front seats in the synagogues, & places of honor at banquets. These men devour the savings of widows & recite long prayers for appearance's sake; it is they who will receive the severest sentence."

Evidently the scribes did most of their religious acts for appearance's sake. They wanted the public to think that they were religious & better than the rest of the world. Moreover, they used their position & public appearance to exploit the kindness & generosity of others such as the widows. Because of their hypocrisy & unkind hearts, Jesus believed that they would receive the severest sentence on Judgment Day. Meanwhile, He praised the poor widow & wanted to highlight her sincere holiness & kind heart to His disciples. He wished that His disciples would follow the poor widow's example & build up their faith life in the same way. Otherwise, they would receive similar sentence like the scribes would on Judgment Day.

We have a similar example of sincere holiness & kind heart in this Sunday's First Reading. Apparently another widow went out of her way to help out & share her meager resource with another human being in his time of need. She put his need before her own, something we do not see often in our world. Here is how this Sunday's First Reading share her shining & heroic example with us: "Elijah [the prophet] went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, 'Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink.' She left to get it; & he called after her, 'Please bring along a bit of bread [also].' ...She answered, 'I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar & a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in & prepare something for myself & my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.'" It continued, "'Do not be afraid,' Elijah said to her. 'Go & do as you propose. But, first make me a little cake & bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself & your son. For the Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth.'" ...She was able to eat for a year...The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry." I do not know about you, but I have kept wondering if I would have a trusting & kind heart of this poor widow & risk my own welfare & resources to help out a stranger like Prophet Elijah. Because of her faith & kind & generous heart, the Lord did a miracle for her & let her jar of flour & jug of oil not go empty over a year. She received the Lord's repayment even in this life. As you can see, our faith in the Lord & our kind & generous heart to another human being will not go unnoticed & will get compensated one way or another.

Our current world tells us to worry about our own welfare only & share nothing with people in need around us. In the Western world especially, we emphasize so much on individualism & neglect the need of community. Everything is about "me" & "my" instead of "us" & "our." People do not have a strong sense of community & common good. They do not

like to make sacrifices for their communities & take care of the social outcast. Their individualistic lifestyle turns them to be selfish & uncaring toward the misfortunate & the needy. It also drives them to have a lonely & unfulfilled life. This Sunday's Gospel & First Reading want to offer our Western world an alternative lifestyle that would foster a kind & generous heart & a personal commitment to common good. This new lifestyle will help us to be grateful to our Creator & kind to our neighbors. We will be able to build up a loving, joyful community & be like the two widows in today's Gospel & First Reading. We will share God's blessings to us with the misfortunate & the needy generously & experience lots of miracles like the one in today's First Reading. The widow & her son apparently were able to eat for over a year as their jar of flour did not go empty nor their jug of oil run dry. For God will not let our compassionate acts go unnoticed & will repay us abundantly in this life & the next.

My dear brothers & sisters, our modern society wants to create a competitive & dog-eat-dog world. It wants us to watch out simply for ourselves & ignore the needs of the misfortunate & the community. That is why we have seen lots of selfish, uncaring, mean, violent acts happen around the world every day. That is why Jesus calls us to be different from the rest of the world by being kind, generous, caring, & grateful. He asks us to reach out to the misfortunate & the needy & have a personal commitment to the common good & our Creator. The two poor widows gave everything they had to God & people in need around them because they loved God & cared about the misfortunate & the needy. They had a kind & compassionate heart to the social outcast & wanted to build up a caring & generous world. Because of their courageous faith & kind hearts, the Lord praised them & let them experience a great miracle. If we dare to do the same, God will surely not forget what we have done & will repay us bountifully in this life & the next.