

## **Thirty Second Sunday of the Year – November 08, 2015**

1 Kings 17:10-16; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

God loves a cheerful giver, the one who is willing to part with things without any hesitation. Compassion and care for others surely prompt our own giving. To give to the other involves sacrifice on the part of the giver. God lavished beauty, complexity and grandeur in creating the world. God, the creator of all, is responsible for all the blessings we enjoy. Life in this world was given to each of us as an undeserved, free gift. We have unequal physical talents, features, and abilities, plus diverse spiritual and intellectual gifts as well. They vary a lot from person to person, but what they all have in common is that they come as free gifts from God who didn't have to create any of us. God invites us to live a sincere and honest life in accordance with the will of God. In the first reading a prophet offers life to a poor widow and her son. The woman only has to respond in faith and God will take care of her needs. She generously and willingly gave to the prophet what little she had and God blessed her abundantly. In the second reading we learn that Jesus offered the one necessary sacrifice to take away sin. He offered himself once and for all to take away our sins. When he comes again in glory he will save all those who have been faithful to him. In the Gospel Jesus teaches that ostentatious behavior by religious leaders and large contributions made by the wealthy to the Temple. But a poor widow contributes all she had to God and receives appreciation from Jesus.

The First Reading taken from the First Book of Kings narrates a touching story of a widow during the time of Israel's famine and she places her trust in God and the prophet. Elijah served as God's faithful prophet during the reign of King Ahab and he wanted to win from the royal house their fidelity to God. To impress upon Ahab's dependence on God Elijah imposed a famine on Israel. The conditions were so severe that God sends Elijah to a widow living in the Kingdom of Sidon and directs her to take care of the Prophet. She has her son who depends on her and trusts her. Although there is water in the midst of drought, she has only the smallest amount of food left. Reduced to absolute penury she is on her way to get firewood to cook a last meal for both of them from a little meal and oil and she could see nothing but death staring at them. Then Elijah, the prophet, himself hungry, comes and asks her for water and bread. When she tells him her situation, he still asks her to make a small scone for him. In a generous act of sharing, she does so and she is rewarded by their being enough for all three of them and the jar of meal and the jug of oil does not empty until the drought is over. She trusts in the word of God through the prophet and is rewarded for the trust she placed in

him. It tells us of the power of God who takes care of the weakest and those who place their trust in him.

Today's Second Reading taken from the Letter to the Hebrews describes the sacrifice of Jesus against the background of the Day of Atonement. The passage tells us that Jesus died once for all time and for all people when he made his perfect sacrifice to remove sin. There is the major difference in the sacrifice of Jesus. He shed his blood but once and enters into the sanctuary of heaven with his blood for the salvation of the world. His Divine Sacrifice as the Lamb of God on the Holy Cross put an end to the first age, the days of the Old Testament and the Covenant of the Law. His Divine Sacrifice as the Lamb of God opened the new and last age in which we now belong, the days of the New Testament and the New Covenant of grace. When Jesus returns at the end of this last age, it will not be to deal with sin by sacrificing himself again, but to judge the living and the dead. It will be to collect the saints who have persevered in their living faith and who are eagerly awaiting for the arrival of the Lord. In his sacrifice Jesus sheds his blood for the salvation of the world. When Jesus comes in his glory he will bring salvation to all those who wait for him that they may live fully in him. The living is those who shine as lights in the world, those who shine in love towards God and their brothers and sisters.

There are two separate incidents in today's Gospel: Christ warns the people to beware of and not to imitate the hypocrisy of the scribes; the widow whose tiny contribution to charity was in fact more generous than the large donations of the rich. She gave the penny which she could ill afford to give, while the others gave from their superfluity. Scribes and Pharisees are presented today as very image-conscious. It was more important to be seen and thought of as good and holy than in being really so. In fact, scribes, as interpreters of the Law, were deeply respected for their great learning. They were well versed in Mosaic Law but unfortunately, they prided on themselves on this superior knowledge and also on their strict observance of its letter. They despised all the other Jews who knew little about the Law and did not always keep it to the letter. In so doing the scribes were violating one of the two basic precepts of the Law, namely, the love of neighbor. They wanted to be noticed by people as observers of the Law and to be saluted reverently wherever they went among them. Even in the places of prayer they wanted the highest places and seats of honor at the feasts. They wore long white robes as a sign of their devotion to the law and people looked at them with awe. Jesus does not condemn all scribes but those who lived a life of hypocrisy. They played on the gullibility of pious widows of wealth with financial profits to themselves while making an outward show of piety. To attract attention and the

admiration of people they lengthened their public prayers. Because of their motive of public attention, Jesus says that their prayers had little value in God's sight. Power and position are all too frequently linked with material greed and corruption. What Jesus tells us today is that discipleship must be characterized by authenticity. It is not shown through external behavior but rather with the interior disposition.

The gospel passage of today places before us the question, who really serves God? This question seems to emerge from the ostentatious public behavior of some Scribes and other learned persons and the contrast between the amount of money given to Temple treasury by the rich people and a poor widow. People can succeed fooling their companions but cannot fool God. Therefore Jesus gives his disciples the vivid example of the sacrifice and generosity of the widow. This picture given in the second part of the Gospel shows a very different picture. In a way, it is a completely different scenario and yet there are connections. The linking word between the two is "widow". There is a striking contrast between the poor widow described in the second part of today's Gospel and the Scribes and Pharisees in the first part. The simple piety of this woman of no social standing is contrasted with the arrogance and social ambitions of some so-called religious leaders. She is also contrasted with the rich donors offering a large amount of money they can easily afford and the tiny amount given by her. It is doubtful that what they offered would not really affect their standard of living. The point that is made by Jesus is that the value of a gift is not necessarily assessed by its quantity. What is important is the heart of the giver which is self-sacrificing. The widow gives out of her poverty and not out of her wealth.

An interesting point we ought to note is that the treasury was actually called a trumpet. This is because it was constructed in the form of a trumpet as if to blow the horn. When the coins were dropped it made a loud noise and all came to know of the contribution a person had made to the Temple. Perhaps the small two coins dropped by the widow did not make any noise but it did not escape the attention of Jesus and he appreciates this great gesture. The poor widow may not even have heard the praises of Jesus and certainly she would receive the reward from God. This poor woman, in a daring act of trust in God's providence, put into the treasury everything she had -- and it was next to nothing. She had two small coins. She put in both. We must remember that in the Kingdom of Jesus everyone counts. At the same time to be counted we must go on changing our ways and surrender ourselves to him and trust in his providence.

Jesus makes the contrast between the money given by the rich people and the tiny amount given by the poor widow. The point being made by Jesus is that the value of a gift is not necessarily assessed by its quantity. Even concerning money sometimes less is actually more. When this is put within the context of contributing to the Temple treasury, somehow symbolizing service to God, then the poor widow comes out ahead. In a sense she gives out of the little she had and nothing to say that she was rich or had possessions of her own. Some commentators feel that Jesus is actually criticizing this practice and objecting that the Temple treasury would accept an offering from a poor widow who obviously could not afford it. While that is an interesting point and not out of character with the concerns of Jesus, it does not seem to be what Mark is emphasizing. In a way the woman's small contribution emphasizes her love for God and for others. She shares with others even what little she has and according to the Gospel, this is authentic love and the service to God.

God always rewards those who persevere in their living faith. No one goes by unnoticed. If a person is proud, he will be noticed; if he is humble, he will also be noticed. If a person is humble like the poor widow whose name no one knows, God will notice him and raise him and reward him according to his sacrifice. We are reminded of Mother Teresa visiting a school in Hong Kong. Over her habit she wore an old grey cardigan and on her feet an ageing pair of leather sandals. A couple of weeks later she was back in India receiving the Templeton Award from Queen Elizabeth of England. Photographs showed her shaking hands with the queen and wearing the same cardigan and the same sandals. The queen did not seem to mind or probably even notice. That was the humility of the great saint. The widow, who fed Elijah during the famine, knew the will of God. The poor widow, who gave her last two coins, also knew the will of God. When Jesus sacrificed himself on the Holy Cross for our sins, he knew the will of God. All three, they embraced a spiritual mind and did what was good, acceptable and perfect in the eyes of God.

Thus in the Gospel of today, Jesus is already judging those among the scribes who act for the sake of their own glory instead of seeking that of God. There is no room for leniency or mercy in the words of the Lord: those who act badly will receive the greater condemnation. Vainglory, pride in all its forms, avarice, these are sins and faults that the Lord will judge severely, along with lust and impurity. Already, he glorifies the poor widow who put into the Treasury of the Temple that entire she had her entire means of subsistence. How misleading are appearances. If God gives us the grace of admitting us into Paradise it will be because of our humility and nothingness before God and the generosity to give on our part. Jesus tells us

that only poor, detached and humble persons will find a place before God. It was the intention of the widow that Jesus glorified in the eyes of his disciples: the two small coins that the widow put into the Treasury were worth her entire life. It was her entire possession and she offered it to God. Nothing ever goes unnoticed in the sight of Jesus. He observes the sacrifice of the widow and the way she made this sacrifice. During the time of Jesus the status of widows in the society was miserable. What the Lord notices is truly important, the offering the poor widow made in love. Any amount of money, gold or silver to proclaim one's power and manifest pride will not have any value before God.

Our Lord's severe condemnation of those scribes, whose exaggerated opinion of their own importance made a mockery of the religion they professed to live, is a serious warning to all his followers not to look for the praise and esteem of their neighbors when doing their good works. Instead it is important that they and we all Christians seek God's praise and esteem in the world to come. A Christian is a follower of Christ who was humble and at the service of others. He is the God-man who emptied himself so that he could be one of us. His humility and sacrifice for the sake of humanity unparalleled. In the Gospel the poor widow who gave her last coins trusted in GOD to provide for her future needs. Today as we offer the Eucharist we ask the grace to give ourselves unhesitatingly God and be at the service of others.

A man named Paul received an automobile from his brother as a Christmas present. When he came out of his office a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car and admiring it. "Is this your car Mister?" he asked. Paul nodded and told him that his brother gave him for Christmas as a present. The boy was astounded. He asked him truly if his brother gave it to him and it did not cost him anything. The he said loudly, oh I wish the same could happen to me. Paul knew what he was wishing for. He wished he had a brother who would give him a gift. But what the boy said again surprised Paul. The boy repeated that he wished to be a brother like that to give freely. Paul looked at him with surprise and impulsively asked him whether he wanted a ride in this new automobile. The boy agreed easily and said he would love a thing like that. Paul smiled and thought that the boy wanted to show the neighborhood his ability to be in a shining new costly car. Bur he was wrong. The boy asked him to stop where there were 2 steps and quickly ran into the house. He was back in a moment carrying his little crippled brother and told him as they sat on the step. "Look, his brother gave it to him for Christmas and it cost him not a cent. One day I am going to give you something like that." Paul had tears in his eyes. On an impulse he came carried the boy to the front seat and took them for a ride in the town.

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