

Sunday Homily for November 7-8, 2009

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B cycle St Joseph's, Greenfield Center/ St. Paul's, Rock City Falls

1st Reading: 1Kings 17:10-16 [The story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146

"The Lord keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry ... the fatherless and the widow God sustains, but the way of the wicked God thwarts."

2nd Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28 [Christ died to take away the sins of the many, that is, of all]

Gospel: Mark 12:38-44 [The hypocrisy of the scribes and the generosity of the widow who gave her whole life]

Listen to this hymn - the words are from the Prophet Micah

["We Are Called", by David Haas Breaking Bread # 593]

□ WE ARE CALLED TO ACT WITH JUSTICE,
WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE TENDERLY,
WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER; TO WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD.

The Scribes in today's Gospel were not listening to the prophet Micah's words which we just sang. They forgot that they were called to act with justice, to love tenderly, to serve and to walk *humbly* with God.

In the Gospel, we see a poor widow putting money in to pay the temple tax. This was just one of many taxes which were a burden on the widow, and to all the poor of Jerusalem (I guess taxes have always been with us). Widows and orphans were the most vulnerable and powerless of the society of Jesus' time. The prophets often said that *true* religion included taking care of them. Some of the money collected in the temple was meant for the support of the poor. The widows of the time had no other support to depend on. Jesus accuses the scribes, the religious leaders, of taking it from the poor and spending it on fancy clothes and their own luxury.

Worst of all, the leaders do not see how they are *connected* with the widow. She lives in misery, and without honor, but the leaders think they are *entitled* to honor, respect and luxury and pay no attention to her. But Jesus *sees* her, and praises her for her gift of her whole self.

Have you ever felt like the widow - that you had nothing to give? Or very little? Have you ever felt like you had given everything, and nobody noticed? I know I can see myself in this widow sometimes.

I wonder what happened to her after this scene in the Temple. I suspect that the followers of Jesus did what they could to take care of her. In the community that Mark was writing to, someone like this widow would have been cared for by the church. That is what it meant to be a community of disciples of Christ. It would have been shocking to them when Jesus implied that the widow was not being cared for by the *leaders* of her own community.

The widow of Zarephath and Elijah in the first reading give us a positive picture of the vision of Jesus for his followers then & now. They are in relationship from the beginning, unlike the scribes and the widow. The situation is desperate. There is a drought, a kind of recession, and both the prophet and the widow are hungry. He asks for a little cake, and she gives him some of what she and her son had to eat.

She hears the call which the scribes had ignored. The prophet makes his need known. Then he promises that God will bless the widow and her family. He is not like the religious leaders of Jesus' time. They are stealing from the poor to make sure that they never have to ask for anything.

Elijah and the widow were both gifted, in different ways. And they are both in need. Each of them trusted, and shared their gifts -she shared her food in response to his need, he lovingly shared God's word of promise. And there was enough for the widow, her family and the prophet.

We are all both *gifted* and *poor*. Our gifts are not a guarantee of God's favor. They are not possessions which we can use only for ourselves. St. Basil, one of the early Fathers of the Church, put it this way, "The second coat in your closet belongs to the poor." And our needs are an invitation to trust in God and to reach out to each other.

Just this past week I experienced this Gospel truth. I was planning to attend the convocation of priests in Saratoga from Wednesday to Friday, but Sr. Anna needed the ministry car which we share to go to a meeting with her religious congregation. I needed a ride to Saratoga, so I asked Fr. Tom, the pastor of the parish in Middleburgh, for a ride. Then I needed to get from Saratoga to Greenfield Center. Deacon Gary (your Parish Life Director) picked me up and took me to supper. My need became a gift and allowed me to deepen two relationships with partners in ministry whose friendship and ministry I value.

Perhaps the greatest gift we have received is the gift of *connection*: both with God and with each other in Christ, and it is sometimes a gift hidden underneath our need.

When I was a student at Siena College in 1964, I began to tutor a 13 year old named Bill in English. I ended up becoming his big brother, in the big brother program which was just starting in Albany. After I graduated and became a Friar, we lost touch, but we were re-connected in 2003. At that time he was driving a truck cross country with his wife Karen and their 13 year old son, Billy. In the past year they have fallen on hard times and were not able to work. They lost their truck and were without food or a place to live and Bill was sick.

The food pantry for Schoharie & Middleburgh got them through several weeks, and later I helped them contact a group that advocates for veterans, so Bill began treatment at the VA hospital. After their extended families could no longer provide a place to live, they moved into a 22' travel trailer, which they told me they got because of prayer, just when they needed it. But they had to move from one Wal*Mart parking lot to another because no one was able to give them a place to park their trailer.

I wanted to help them, but I live too far away from the hospital where Bill was being treated for hepatitis. Finally, I was able to help them make a connection with a friend from Cursillo who invited them to park at his farm in Ravena.

Now they are living in an apartment in Albany through the connections they were able to make with the VA and social services. The last time I visited, on the way to celebrate Mass at Greenfield Center, they gave me their last hot dog and a cup of coffee, and I prayed with them for Bill's healing. I'm not sure who was Elijah and who was the widow that day, because each of us there shared our gifts and our needs. I met Christ in them, and they saw Christ in me.

The second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, proclaims that God so loved us that he sent Jesus to heal our deepest wounds.

At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, I will pray in your name, one of the Eucharistic prayers for Masses with Children, I will say, "you sent Jesus to bring us to you, Father, and to gather us around him as the children of one family so we can become friends and share our joys and sorrows."

Each of the gifts we have received is a call as well, and each of our needs is an opportunity to make deeper connections with Christ and each other, so we can live the words of the song we began with.

□ Sing! Sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one!
God will reign, and we'll walk with each other as sisters and brothers
united in love!

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