

November 11, 2018 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

There was a little boy, six years old and he went to Mass for the first time, but his Mom decided, “Oh, I don’t want to go to Mass so I’ll send you by yourself.” So he went, and he sat through Mass and he came home. His Mom said, “So, what did you think of Mass?” He said, “I think it was very unfair.” She said, “Why do you think it’s unfair?” “Because Father did all the work at the altar and these guys came and took the money away from him.”

Today’s theme could be called, the tale of two widows. In the Book of Kings, Elijah in the first reading is running away from Queen Jezebel. She has caused Israel to worship pagan gods and goddesses, to offer sacrifices to idols, and she just corrupted the whole country. Her husband King Ahaz doesn’t have testicular fortitude or courage to say no to her. Elijah ends up killing all her prophets, 450 to be exact, so he is running because she sent the army after him. He’s kind of in desperate straits so he goes to Zarephath, to a widow who is in Samaritan territory and this woman is not Jewish. This woman is considered unclean, but she is also a widow and she has no husband to support her in the system. She has no rights, she has no income, and she is supporting a son. They don’t tell us how old he is, but we have to assume that he’s younger because if he was older he would be taking care of her. She is gathering sticks to make a fire to have one last meal and Elisha comes in and says, “By the way bring me a cup of water.” She’s telling him what’s going on and he says, “Oh, why don’t you make me a cake too.” Sounds very selfish, doesn’t he? She’s got one last meal and he wants it. Well, you must look at how God works. “Bring me a cup of water.” Does that remind us of a story in the New Testament? It should; the woman at the well. The woman at the well has three strikes against her; she was a woman talking to a man, she was a non Jew talking to a Jew, and she was an adulterous, that’s why she was out there at noon and not early morning with the rest of the women. She was an outcast and yet Jesus crossed all boundaries and He wants to see, can she cross boundaries. So, He says, “Give me a cup of water.” And she does. What she is doing is putting her whole life on the line by giving him a cup of water. Everything she has is wrapped up in that cup of water, she has nothing left. And then she is becoming Jesus’s disciple, an evangelist going around telling everybody about Jesus because she took the chance and gave everything she had to God and God rewarded her. This is what’s happening in our first reading as well. God is challenging this widow, “Give me everything you have.” “Give me everything you have.” She’s not even Jewish, this isn’t her God but she goes with it and God rewards her because she gave everything she had, her whole life. The word for life is also the word for livelihood so you might see the connection in the gospel. God wants us to give from our very poverty, not from our excess. Yes, as a pastor I have to tell you I will take your excess, but God wants us to take it from our poverty from our whole life. “God, this is going to cost me dearly.” He knows we’re going to do it, not out of having to do it, but out of respect and love for Him. So giving to God is not so much for God but it’s for us, because it enables us to grow emotionally, spiritually. If we want our faith to grow, if we want more faith, do we keep it to ourselves? No, we pass it on, share it. “Oh but Father, I can’t talk to somebody about Jesus I don’t know enough, what if they start quoting Scripture?” So what, start talking, you’d be surprised what the Holy Spirit gives you. Once you’re finished talking to that person about Jesus, guess what? More faith than you had before. If you want joy in your life, you bring joy to other people and more joy is in your life. Love, do you want to keep all your love to yourself? Is that going to improve it, is that going to increase it? No. You give it away, you share it and then you get more love. This is what is happening in our first reading. This was happening with the woman at the well, it’s also what’s happening in the gospel with the other woman. God wants our love. God wants us to give out of love, but He wants our poverty,

what's going to hurt us, what's going to cost us because that way we grow. All the saints know this. That prayer of Saint Francis is an excellent example where Francis is not asking for wonderful things for himself, he's asking for the ability to give what he has away, so that he grows in those virtues. So this woman was rewarded for giving all she had, her whole life. She was able to eat and drink for a whole year for free. Can you imagine? After the first week, "Hi Edna, I haven't gone shopping for a week and I still have all these groceries." And can you imagine how tired and sick her neighbor would be after a year? But that's how God rewarded her and so she would share that news, share the information and I'll bet you ten to one she became Jewish, she became a follower of the one true God.

In our gospel reading Jesus is talking about something else in the beginning. He's talking about the scribes. The scribes are the ones that can read and write. That's about less than 1% of the population and yet they're called to provide their services without pay, they don't get paid. So, they have to start figuring out, "Well how can I bring honor to myself, how can I blow myself up in importance?" So they wear long robes. Everybody else had ankle length robes or knee length robes depending on their job but they were wearing long robes to show, "I don't have to do manual labor." Then they accept greetings in the marketplaces. At Jesus's time, the higher-ranking person was addressed first by the lower ranking person. So it's like with the bishop I would say, "Good morning excellency." And then he could say, "Good morning Father, or good morning peon," whatever he's going to use. That's what they were looking for and the scribes wanted people to say it LOUD and put extra words in there like an introduction. And the seats of honor at the synagogues. When you go to the synagogue there are chairs along the back wall on either side of the tabernacle; their tabernacle has the scroll with scripture in it. They wanted to be up here next to the scroll, next to the sacred place in the seats of honor. They would come up to the foot of the sanctuary and go, "Ahem ahem, until the rabbi recognized them, "Oh, please Mr. scribe please come and sit up here," and that's where they wanted to sit. Then of course, because of the banquets, they wanted to flow in with their long robes, like glide in and be seated at the beginning, why? Who gets to eat first? The people at the head table. Guess what? The head table gets as much as they want, too bad for the back where they run out of beans and rice and whatever. So, this is what He's talking about and what He's talking about is, these people give nothing away. Not only that, because they don't have any money, they attach themselves to widows and slowly syphon off their savings and then take over their house when they die or earlier. So they are killing the innocent people here because God is always on the side of widows and orphans. They are not very nice people and what He's talking about is they're hoarders; they're hoarding power, they're hoarding glory, they're hoarding recognition, they're hoarding all these things because they don't have money. They give nothing away, nothing of themselves, God can't work with them because they are all into themselves. Then He sits down in the treasury of the temple. Now the treasury was this wall and it had trumpet-like devices going into the wall and on the other side of the wall they were counting money. People would come and put in their coins, because there was no paper money, and these things were made of metal so if you put in a large sum, clank clank clank clank clank and everybody stops, "Wow, he's holy he's giving to the temple like that." So they wanted to go in and give great sums so that everybody would watch them and look at them and, "See how great I am!" And yet this poor widow comes in with two little copper coins worth about a penny today and she puts them in, clink. Then people would be looking at her like, "How come you didn't give more what's wrong with you? Putting her down. But Jesus is watching with a smile because He knows as God, she's just given everything she has, everything she has to live on just went to the treasury and He is very very pleased, He's smiling, He's got a warm look on His face. He says, "They have contributed from their surplus wealth which doesn't cost them anything, but she has given her

whole life. Everything she has, she's relying on God for food for tomorrow, for a place to live tomorrow. She's given out of her whole being, her whole life, out of love and respect for God, not because she has to.

We learn some things about what Jesus is teaching in these readings. And you know, first off it gives us an insight into Jesus; He has a warm side to Himself because He is sitting there watching her with tremendous love. Elisha would have looked at his widow the same way, with tremendous love because she was respecting and loving the God he served. Saint Therese of Avila said it best, "God doesn't need our gift, (The Church does but God doesn't.) but what He wants is the love that motivates it." Not giving because we have to, but giving because we love God, giving because we want to. When we give out of love that makes us equal in God's sight. It doesn't matter how much money we make, how much we're doing, how much we're donating, if we are doing it out of love, we are equal in God's sight. And by giving like that, it shows we are made in the image and likeness of God in our ability to share with others our time, talent and treasure. Because where do we get our time, talent and treasure? From God, and by giving it away, sharing it with Him or whoever, we are being God-like; we are being Christian, followers of Christ. Because what did Christ give? Everything, His whole life. Everything we have is a gift from God and when we give from our hearts, from our poverty, from our very selves, especially if it hurts us, first it's going to cause us to sacrifice and we are truly God-like because we recognize, "It's really not mine." God is giving us the chance to grow in grace, to grow in holiness, but to also grow in our ability to give. Once you start giving you realize it brings you joy and your heart gets bigger (like the Grinch), it gets bigger and bigger and bigger and you are able to give more and realize, "Hey happiness in the human life is to give time, talent, treasure." And then God is crediting us with a whole lot, all three major religions say giving alms, cheerfully and gladly takes away a whole number of sins. God rewards us. The widow in the gospel, we don't hear what happened to her, but you can bet she was taken care of, you can bet with God watching, sitting right there, something good was going to happen to her. The same thing happens with us. If we give and it hurts, God's going to reward us, if we give because we love God, God's going to reward us. Not only that, ourselves and other people will benefit as well.

God bless you