

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE 32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)

8TH NOVEMBER 2015

1 K 17. 10-16; Heb 9.24-28; Mark 12, 38-44

We come to Mass with different emotions. Sometimes we are joyful, content. Other times we are burdened or low. But ultimately I believe we come in response to the sacrifice Jesus made for us as it's his heart calling to our heart.

On All Saints day last week we heard the lovely promises of the beatitudes; full of hope, especially for the poor and oppressed. And Father concluded with an invitation to us all to strive to be saints. Now, I know and those of you who know me well, or maybe all of you, realise I don't have a chance of being holy. Yet Father warned us not to think like that. So OK, I won't. But if I am going to strive to be holy, I need to develop a faith that trusts God can do it for and with me.

Now, let's look at two amazing examples of trust. Elijah. He listened to God and prophesied there would be a drought, and there was. The drought got worse and it harmed everyone, including Elijah. Yet, for the person who deeply trusts, a trial can also become a time of grace. During this trial God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath where a widow will help him. So he goes, and interestingly when Elijah meets the widow he tests her faith. He asks her for a drink and some bread, saying, "This is the word of the Lord, the jar shall not be emptied nor the jug of oil run dry, until the drought ends". In other words, listen to God, do as He asks and he will feed you. She gives her everything, and God looks after them! So, point 1 is trust, even in times of trial.

As so often, God chose someone who was considered insignificant to demonstrate his care and power. You see, a widow in those days had no form of income. They depended completely on the goodwill of family or members of the tribe for all their needs. So, God is showing us that everyone is valuable to him; that all he needs from us is our willingness to do as he asks and he will give us whatever is needed. We'll see this again with the widow in today's Gospel.

Just before we consider this, a warning for us all! "Beware those teachers of the Law who go around in long robes....who make a show of long prayers". Well, my prayers aren't that long!! But here I am in long robes! Does Jesus mean it's NOT OK to wear these? Well, on the one hand it is a warning to all clergy not to get overtaken by pride in their status, not to get carried away if we are offered respect. YET, note that Jesus is addressing the crowds, not the Scribes! I think Mark is using the term Scribe as a caricature for our behaviour. He might today have said "Beware the politicians in their fine positions who promise so much, but are

in fact looking after their own interests". By the way, just as most scribes were good people, so I think are most politicians so please take this in context! You may not know, but widows weren't even allowed to look after their own estates once their husbands died, so the scribes did this for them but took an unfair percentage of any money from the widows for themselves! Mark here is warning all of us to be alert to why and how we do things. Where is our inward desire? Let's be alert to the risk of pride affecting the attitude of our heart.

We may also consider further that phrase, making a show of their long prayers. Here's a real heart search. I doubt any of us think we do this, yet do we ever pretend to pray? (I stand here having to acknowledge that I do) Perhaps we pray for an increase in our church, but never invite anyone. Perhaps we pray for patience, but don't try to practice it! For more faith, but never risk stepping out in faith (which is one place it will grow). We may pray for justice in the world, but not do anything towards it. On this point, a heartfelt thank you from myself, and Matt and Warlei who were here last night asking for supporters in their work of rescuing young girls from the slavery of prostitution in Brazil. As well as the donations, so many of you quietly helped clean and tidy up everything. Friendships were formed and strengthened, and there was a feeling of love in action, thank you.

And of course this weekend we remember all those who made the ultimate sacrifice, they gave their lives because they wanted to make this world a more just place to live. We remember what it cost them and their families (and so we need to do what we can, however small, to safeguard what they fought for).

If we move on to the widow in the Gospel, note some important teaching is being given. We know this because it's one of those occasions when Jesus calls his disciples to him (pay attention whenever that happens in the Gospels). Jesus is highlighting to them, and us, the importance God places on HOW we give, not just what.

It's significant she had two coins and that in financial terms weren't worth much! Jesus says she gives everything, her very living. (Does this ring a bell – Elijah and the widow?) She could have given 50%, but no, she gives all she had. You see in fact everything we have is God's; we are His stewards looking after his gifts. And not just of money, but of our time, work, talents etc. We have a duty to consider what it is we are doing with everything God gives us. God is looking at our hearts. Let's not be grudging, when we give our offerings, our time, our skills, be joyful about it. And when we come to Mass, it's not just duty, be aware it's God's heart calling our heart to bring us here.

And finally, remember it's not the size of the gift, be it money time or talent – however small, however seemingly unimportant, it is all valuable and wonderful when given to / for God.

In conclusion, these two widows embody the sacrificial love of Jesus; a giving of self for others; we too must live by a faith that trusts, that involves itself in works of charity and self giving.

We will be judged, not by how much we give – for the scribes and wealthy contribute far more than the widow. Rather, we will be judged by whether our gifts reflect our livelihood, our talents, our whole beings, our attitude of heart.

Let's give not out of a sense of forced duty, but in a spirit of generosity and love (see 2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Do not be afraid, the man of God tells us today. As we sing in today's Psalm, the Lord will provide for us, as he sustains the widow.

God Bless you all, and I thank you for the many things that you already do in your lives, and pray that we will grow in our trust and obedience to our Lord.

Then as we give God what is rightfully his, we may be surprised as we find our own jars never run dry.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser