

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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The Joy of Sacrifice

The First Reading unfolds the story of a widow who accepted the will of God, which kept both her son and herself living in abundance through severe famine and drought. It relates how the Prophet Elijah asked for water and food from the woman of Zarephath, who was making preparations for her own 'last supper' while awaiting death. To our amazement, from whatever little she had for herself and her son, she decided to help the prophet by providing a meal for him from what she had remaining.

Then, in the Gospel, we meet a poor widow who donated everything she had to the Temple. The similarity between them is, both widows' hearts were so rich and generous, even though they had little to nothing to spare. Both women teach an attitude of letting go; it is a lesson of sacrifice.

In today's Gospel passage, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus directs his teaching onto what the character of his disciples should be by presenting two contrasting attitudes. As part of his teaching, Jesus cautions his listeners and to guard themselves against being like the ostentatious and hypocritical scribes who were the interpreters of Old Testament Law. They were described in terms of what they seek and acquire: that is, the desire to adorn distinctive clothing in long robes, demanding respect, and having the best seats at worship; always putting themselves on public display. At the time, it was the custom for these scribes to serve as Trustees of widows' estates, receiving a huge share of the estate. Taking advantage of this, they devoured the houses of widows as many of the scribes were misusing this custom to accumulate wealth for themselves. They were greedy and selfish.

In contrast to those scribes, Jesus calls the attention of his disciples to a "poor widow" who is described in terms of what she gives: two copper coins that were worth only a



penny; the smallest coins in circulation at the time. She had put everything she had in her contribution to the Temple: her entire living, literally her life and her entire physical existence. Here Jesus makes clear, the distinction between those people who are not ready to share what they have to gain the Kingdom of Heaven, and the poor woman who is ready to sacrifice everything for the Kingdom of God.

The widow becomes the prototype of Jesus' own sacrifice. The poor woman who trusted God and was ready to sacrifice herself is depicted as a model of Jesus who was on his way to embrace his death; to sacrifice himself to become the salvation for all humanity, displaying the same qualities as the poor widow. The invitation of Jesus to his disciples was indeed a call to "look at her": to look and observe deeply into her actions, her life, and to imitate the generous and trusting faith of the woman.

As described in the Gospel, while the rich simply gave to the Temple contributions from their own surplus wealth, the poor woman truly made the real sacrifice to support the temple from the meagre little that she had. She teaches a great lesson for us living today, in a culture steeped in competing for wealth. That the rich will not be truly and really rich enough unless they know and learn to give, share, and sacrifice.

Let us reflect: are we rich enough in our hearts to share our wealth, time, friendship, compassion, respect, love, and kindness with our brothers and sisters? Are we ready to sacrifice for Jesus and to trust God, who always abundantly provides?