

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 7-8, 2009

“The poor widow put in more than all the others.”

---Mark 12:41-44

In today's first reading, we hear the story of a poor widow of a town named Zarephath. There was a great drought in the land because the Israelites were worshipping Ba'al, the pagan god of fertility. They believed that Ba'al would bring the rain to fertilize the land, but God withheld the rain to show them that he was the true God of the rain, the only true God.

We also hear that the widow only had a small amount of food when Elijah, the man of God, asked her for something to eat. She responded that she was planning to prepare what little she had for herself and her son and then sit down and die. But Elijah reassured her and told her that she would not suffer from want. So she trusted and obeyed him and prepared a cake of bread for him to eat. God miraculously fulfilled the promise that Elijah had made. The woman's jug of oil and jar of flour did not run out for the entire time of the drought.

In the Second Reading, we see that Jesus is our High Priest and has offered himself as the perfect offering once and for all. The Old Testament priests offered many sacrifices because all of their sacrifices were imperfect. None of them fully accomplished that which was intended—to free us from our sins. Jesus, on the other hand, offered the perfect sacrifice. He was sinless, and therefore his sacrifice was one of pure love. Furthermore, he was God's only Son, and, therefore, his sacrifice of his own life was absolutely perfect and accomplished what it sought—the remission of our sins.

Today's Gospel provides a powerful contrast between the scribes who loved to be seen and given places of honor, and the poor widow who contributes everything she has to the temple. The scribes are described as people who devour the savings of widows. They seek contributions for their religious work, but everything they do is for prestige. They use religion as a way to advance themselves at the cost of others.

The poor widow, on the other hand, demonstrated the true spirit of religious faith. Her small contribution was all that she had. She was placing herself totally in the hands of the Lord. She was not seeking power and prestige—she was simply performing an act of absolute trust. This woman had given more than anyone. She placed her entire trust in God, because she has no one else to rely on.

This widow teaches us a lesson. What money she has is very little, but she knows that money alone will not save her, or bring her comfort. Her life is in God's hands. She knows this. The disposition of her heart is to be generous. She trusts that God will not fail her. She prays for God's kingdom to come. She prays for daily bread. She prays for the grace to live in peace with others, and to be delivered from all evil.

She is what the Beatitudes call "poor in spirit," for her only treasure was the love of God.

Readings:

1 Kings 17:10-16: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings17.htm#v10>

Psalm 146: 7-10: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm146.htm>

Hebrews 9:24-28: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews9.htm#v24>

Mark 12:38-44: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark12.htm#v38>

