

32nd Sunday OT – (Year B) – November 11, 2018

1 KGS 17:10-16; PS 146:7, 8-9, 9-10; HEB 9:24-28; MK 12:38-44

In the Fall of 2016, Bishop Olmsted “**invited**” the priests of the Diocese of Phoenix to a gathering where he would introduce his vision for a *diocese-wide evangelization and discipleship campaign*. Just so you know—in “**bishop-speak**”, the word “**invite**” means “**you better be there**”. So, I “**accepted**” the invitation—because in “**priest-speak**”, to “**accept**” an invitation from your bishop means to **obey**.

When I went to that meeting two years ago, I confess I was not all that excited about essentially taking on a **second full-time job**—running a **Cathedral** and running a **campaign in the parish** at the *same time*—nor was I thrilled about the prospect of *asking for money*. I went into that meeting **skeptical**—but I walked out “**sold**” on bishop’s vision...not out of blind **obedience**...but rather, out of sincere **conviction**.

And it all boiled down to **one thing** that the bishop said.

When faced with the prospect of embarking on a **\$100M diocesan wide campaign**, Bishop Olmsted confessed that he had been asking himself, with some trepidation, “**What will happen to me if I do this?**” Then he took it to prayer, and the question changed to: “**What will happen to me if I don’t do this?**”

In his **revised question**, it was clear that Bishop Olmsted recognized this initiative not so much as an **obligation** imposed on him, but rather, an *opportunity* to invest **now** for the benefit many **Catholic generations to come**. He saw this campaign as an extension of the missionary efforts of **St. Junipero Serra** and **Fr. Eusebio Kino** who three centuries earlier brought the light of Christ to the Southwest for the first time.

You and I are the beneficiaries of the **great personal sacrifices** of these **holy missionaries** and of those who followed in their footsteps—as we worship God in churches that **we didn’t build** and as we benefit from the faith handed on to us by others in a long line throughout the last 300 years. **Now it’s our turn!**

So, I walked out of that meeting two years ago convinced that the campaign was an inspiration of the Holy Spirit and, yet, I was quite relieved that we would not have to begin our parish's phase of the campaign until **July of 2018**.

Well, then this **past June**, as our phase of the campaign approached, the *abuse and cover-up scandal broke in Pennsylvania* and I thought to myself, “**Oh, great, I'm going to be starting our campaign in the midst of a scandal. Could anything be worse?**”

Then *I* took it to prayer and the Lord showed **me** that the timing of our parish's effort in the campaign is perfect—according to **God's perfect timing**. Just as Bishop Olmsted's perspective changed **after praying about it**, so did mine!

I began to see the campaign as a **concrete expression** of my own faith in the words of **Jesus in Matthew's Gospel** where he said, “*The gates of Hell will not prevail against my Church*” (cf. Mt 16:18). I realized that God was inviting me—as a spiritual father—to help **my parish family**—all of you—to see how this campaign allows us to **position the Church to evangelize this culture** in the *future*, once we weather the **storm of scandal** and come out the other side a **humbled and purified Church**.

I am always delighted by God's timing!

Back in June, when we scheduled this particular weekend to publicly kick off our phase of the campaign, I had not looked ahead to see the Gospel Readings for **today's Mass**. Two weeks ago, when I looked at today's Gospel for the first time, I knew, once again, that **there are no coincidences with God**.

St. Mark puts two very contrasting incidents side-by-side in today's Gospel. On the one side were the religious leaders—the **Scribes and Pharisees**—jockeying for **position, power and popularity**. On the other, was a **poor widow** so centered on God that, despite the corruption of the leaders of her religion, her only care was to give back to God from what he had given her. Her faith was so great that she gave **everything she had** and left the rest in the Lord's hands. **We heard in the Gospel:**

[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, “Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.” (Mk 12:41-44)

This juxtaposition of **two very different religious attitudes** speaks volumes to us about the situation in the Church today and **what kind of response we are invited to make**. From the structure of today’s Gospel passage, we can begin to see how **our participation** in this evangelization and discipleship campaign is, in fact, **our confident, Christ-centered answer, to the evil infecting an influential faction of the top leadership of the Church**.

The Church is hurting right now. But the Church has weathered severe crises countless times in her long history through the **emergence of great saints in the times of deepest darkness**. **Personal holiness is**—and always **will be**—the only answer to the evil that threatens to overtake the Church at certain moments in her history—**including the present time**.

The widow in today’s Gospel did not get **bogged down** or **paralyzed** by what the corrupt religious leaders were doing. She focused on her relationship with God—and entrusted everything to him. *And her humble witness and heroic trust continues to evangelize the world...every time this Gospel passage is proclaimed!*

The Church needs **us** to have the **faith** and **confidence** of the widow. The Church has passed through severe difficulties in the past, thanks to **courageous, saintly** people who weathered the storm and, who through their faithfulness, were able to **pass the Church on to a future generation**, sometimes **battered** and **bruised**, but certainly more *holy*.

Now, let’s look more specifically at the campaign.

The Diocese seeks to raise **\$100 million** to expand our **evangelization** efforts to make **disciples** for Jesus Christ. Ss. Simon & Jude Cathedral is asked to contribute **\$1.7 Million** to that effort. I am delighted to report that, even before making this campaign public in our parish today, we have already raised between **\$500k and \$600K** of that total through the **quiet generosity of only 50 or so parish families**. For those of you who have made these gifts—I offer my sincere, heartfelt “*thank you*”. Imagine what short work we can make of this whole goal as *every one* of the **3,000+ families** in our parish make a gift to the campaign!

One of the most exciting parts of the campaign is that **35% of every dollar raised by a parish comes back to the parish**. If we reach our goal, we will have nearly **\$600K** to invest back into our parish. The money coming back to our parish will help us attend to important **spiritual and temporal needs of the Cathedral**.

As we know—**beauty evangelizes**. Many people are drawn to the Cathedral—in person or through the broadcast Mass—because of the **reverent Liturgy**, the **stellar Sacred Music**, the **visual beauty of our pipe-organ and the Crucifix** above our altar. We intend to enhance the *interior* beauty of our Cathedral with **new tile for entire floor of Church, including the sanctuary** as well as **refinishing or replacing the pews**.

We intend to enhance the *exterior* beauty of the Church with **landscaping improvements** so that, in **an otherwise rough neighborhood**, Ss. Simon & Jude Cathedral will truly be *a diamond in the rough* for the people from all walks of life—including the homeless—who find their way into this Church at any hour of the day, attracted by the **peace**, and captivated by the **beauty**, in order to find rest for their souls.

Many of the roofs on our buildings on campus are in dire need of repair. A portion of what comes back to the parish will go to **roof repair**.

With some of the funds, we will **refurbish the kitchen in Smith Hall**—which serves our **school cafeteria**, and which is also used by many parish groups to

prepare food for **retreats, spiritual and social** gatherings, and especially our **Fall Festival**.

Any monies left over will go into a **maintenance fund** that will enable us to keep up with the many facilities needs on our large, **aging** campus.

Three weeks from now, everyone in this parish will be invited to make a sacrificial gift to the campaign. The monies raised will fund the many important diocesan apostolates including our **Catholic Schools**; the **Newman Centers** on the three major public university campuses in our diocese; **Catholic School tuition assistance** for students from pre-K through high school. Other funds will be used to build a **retirement home for priests; homes for women transitioning out of prison or jail and back to society; care for the homeless and the hungry** through St. Vincent de Paul; **care for our elderly and disabled** through the Foundation for Senior Living; to name some of the major initiatives.

One of the greatest blessings we are experiencing in the Diocese of Phoenix is with our seminarians. We currently have more seminarians in formation for the Diocese of Phoenix than at any time in our history. I think the highest number of seminarians we ever had when I was in formation was 25. **We now have more than 40 seminarians and even more applying to enter!** \$4M of the funds will go toward seminarian education so that, as more men respond to the call to discern the priesthood, we will never have to say “no” to them for financial reasons!

You can find much more detailed information on each aspect of the Campaign at the **campaign website**. Just type the words “**Together Let Us Go Forth Campaign**” into **Google** and click on the first page that comes up.

Over the next two weekends you will be hearing more about the Campaign from me and from others in this parish. I invite you over these next two weeks to pray with your family about how the Lord is calling you to participate in the **Together Let Us Go Forth** evangelization and discipleship campaign.

A few weeks ago, I introduced you to the **Novena of Surrender** in a bulletin letter. This is a perfect prayer for discerning your participation in this important campaign—a prayer that I used to discern my own gift. Incidentally, **the first person in each parish asked to make a gift to the campaign is the pastor.**

We can respond to the current difficulties in the Church in one of two ways:

- 1) We can **hunker down** and **hide** out of *shame*; or...
- 2) We can **recommit to radical personal holiness** and become **instruments of Jesus Christ** to bring about **reform** and **healing** in the Church for ourselves *and for those in future generations who will follow in our footsteps.*

The Church is our Church. The Church is you and me.

How the Church looks and lives in the future depends, in large part, on the **decisions** we make...and on the *investments* we make...**today.**

So, I ask that you begin **today** to do what Bishop Olmsted did and what I did as we discerned our own participation in this important campaign—**PRAY!**

And trust in the Lord to show you the way.