

November 11, 2018

1 Kgs 17:10-16; Heb 9:24-28; Mk 12:38-44

Mass Reflection:

After we complete the introductory rites we sit to listen to the Lord through his word and be fed. It is easy for all of us to let our minds drift during the readings and homily, but this is a privileged time to hear God speak to us directly. God uses scripture to communicate to us where we are at the present time. You can hear a passage of scripture 500 times and then gain a message the 501st time that never occurred to you before. God speaks to us uniquely in our hearts in a place beyond the words. That is the space where we encounter THE Word - Jesus Christ.

The homily is also a time to see what God is saying to you individually. I have had the experience a number of times where someone will come up to me and say "Father, it really hit me when you said *X* in the homily, that is what I really needed to hear right now." In many of those times what they hear was not what I said - but God used the words, the images and the concepts in the homily to speak another word that the person needed to hear - a communication directly from God to the heart. The combination of the coordinated readings, and the homily reflecting on these readings creates a unique environment for the word of God to speak to us.

Homily:

He swaggered into my counseling office about 10 years ago dressed in the latest fashion for a young man 19 years old. Crisp new clothes, spotless sneakers, absolutely perfectly formed visor on his hat. He had no job, and he told me all about his plans to have (within a very short time) a Ferrari, a BMW, a big house and millions of dollars - everyone would have to respect him, everyone would envy him. He was sent to me by the court due to theft, drug dealing, weapons possession, and assaultive behavior. Four years later he had no money and was homeless. This is a true story of a big dreamer whose pursuit of wealth at all cost has left him out in the cold.

I thought of him when I was reading this Gospel. Jesus cautions us about those who look to gain wealth, seats of honor, and fine clothes. He explains that they will take advantage of the weak (his example is to take the houses of widows) and then justify themselves with prayers. They, like the young man I told you about, are focused on themselves and on elevating themselves, even if it means harming the weak, even if it means lying, and even offering false prayers in the process. Sometimes, like the kid I know, they get a sort of payback in this life and all their deeds come back on them and everything collapses ... sometimes they become the CEO of a major corporation and hold on to vast wealth. In the end, Jesus tells us: *They will receive a very serious condemnation.* Seeking only for ourselves, building up a treasure store so we don't

have to fall back on God, having many things to amuse us - and in the process giving less to the Church and those in need - might elevate us for a time, but in the end will not satisfy us.

In the first reading Elijah is a person in need. He approaches a poor widow and asks for water, she has enough of this and goes to get it for him without question. Then he asks for food. She explains her fear and her own need - she has almost run out of food and she says: *just now I was [going] to prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.* He does an interesting thing - he asks her to go and prepare a small cake for him first. He doesn't say how much, he lets her decide, then he tells her to tend to herself and her son. He says: *Do not be afraid.* If she attends to the needs of others, while not neglecting her duties to herself and her family, then God will provide. Unexplainably the food supply does not run out for the whole year. She kept her priorities straight, and God provided. I have had this also happen in my life.

This brings us to the widow in the Gospel story. Jesus points to her as an important example to all of us. She is poor, yet she doesn't fear - she knows that if she puts the portion (an amount she has decided, like the widow in the first reading) to a holy purpose, then God will provide. Pope Benedict once reflected: "... the widow of the Gospel, and likewise the widow in the Old Testament, gives everything, gives herself, putting herself in God's hands. ... This is the everlasting meaning of the poor widow's offering which Jesus praises; for she has given more than the rich ... she gave all that she had to live on, hence she gave herself." What are the holy purposes that we can risk to support? Where are the places where we can trust in the power of God and not (as the young man I spoke of at the beginning) only trust in our own powers and thrift to provide? Where has God given us talents and resources that are to be shared?

Jesus point to the widow in the temple and by extension to that other widow of the old testament. God gives to each of us a bit more that we *really* need, and calls us to share this in love (not grudgingly). We have to provide reasonably for ourselves and our families, but we can think of where is there really a surplus that we can share? We all waste a lot of time and money that could be better used. How can we more selflessly use these resources? We, like the widows, are left to decide. It doesn't have to just be resources of money, you could offer your time, or your personal gifts and talents. The more we give of ourselves, in proportion to how we have been blessed, the more we also imitate Jesus himself who made the ultimate gift of himself when he gave everything he had on the cross for us. Let us hear the words of Elijah: *Do not be afraid.* As God provided for the two widows, God will provide for us as well.