

**November 11, 2018**

**[155] Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*1 Kings 17:10-16 / Psalm 146 / Hebrews 9:24-28 / Mark 12:38-44*

The prophet Elijah asks a poor widow for a cup of water and a bit of bread. She is astonished because she has only a little flour remaining to feed herself and her son what would be their last meal. They are literally starving. Nevertheless, he insists that she make him a small cake. Indeed, in verses not included here, God commands the prophet to make this request of the widow. The incident seems to be one of privilege taking advantage of the poor. However, there is a surprise twist. She does as Elijah asks and we are told that God miraculously responds by insuring for a year that her flour jar would not go empty and her jug of oil would not run dry.

This illustrates a pattern revisited again and again between God and his people. If one places trust in God, no matter how absurd and threatening the situation, the Lord will take care of his own. This is a parable moment for the entire People of God. Earlier the prophet is commanded by God to proclaim a drought to bring the fallen-away people back to the exclusive worship of the Lord. They are called back to fidelity, to appreciate that they are dependent upon the Lord's mercy and generosity. When the lesson is learned, the drought is withdrawn. The widow kept faith with God even though she does not understand. Similarly, if God's people want to flourish and to be happy, they have to place faith and obedience in the God of their fathers.

The responsorial affirms that ours is a God that has a preferential option for the poor. Various Jewish leaders got it wrong when they absolutely associated land, prosperity and progeny to right standing with God. The widow in the story had almost nothing but her faith made her rich and saved her. We find in the ministry of Jesus that an outreach to the poor and the oppressed is more than a social justice program; rather, it is the manner in which discipleship is realized. Those that were cast off by the Jewish elders were looked upon by Christ as precious children in the family of God. Indeed, Jesus will speak of wealth and possessions

as a distraction from the Christian mission. Similarly today, those who preach a prosperity gospel distort the meaning of the Good News and inadvertently curse the poor. Note the first verses of our psalm today: “The LORD keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free.” God will be good for his children, but the gravity must be upon the divine giver and not upon the gifts.

Jesus is critical of the scribes who place inordinate importance in the quality of their clothes, the esteem they are held before men, their posturing at prayer and their privilege that uncaringly “devour[s] the houses of widows.” He points out to his disciples the discrepancy between them and a poor widow who only has two small cents to place in the treasury— all she has to live upon. Those who give from surplus wealth are envisioned as trusting more in themselves and in their own devices than in divine providence. We all need to discern ourselves as the poor man or poor woman. Everything we have is a gift. Earthly things are passing and must be used for a higher ends— sustaining life and giving proper respect to persons.

As a continuing aside from last week, Paul’s letter to the Hebrews explores the meaning of Christ’s high priesthood. The incarnation insures that he has the authority or power to offer genuine atonement. Unlike the high priest who annually enters the sanctuary of the temple, Christ as both priest and victim offers not the blood of slaughtered animals but his own blood. Jesus dies once and for all in the oblation of Calvary; he will never suffer and die again. (The Mass is a clean or unbloody re-presentation of this one-time mystery of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection.) While sin and death are conquered by Christ, the consequences have yet to be unraveled and await the second coming.

- Where is our gravity, upon the gifts given or the giver of gifts?
- Do we acknowledge our basic dependence upon God?
- Do we merely have possessions or do they possess us?
- How do we use the resources given to us, for ourselves or the kingdom?
- Where is our treasure and is it passing or eternal?