

Homily - 32nd Sunday of the Year - November 7, 2021

Waiting in line is not one of my strong suits. In fact, I hate waiting in line. On the other hand, I love going to Dunkin Donuts, but going there usually means waiting in line. As I pull into the parking lot, the major decision I have to make is do I wait in line in my car or do I wait in line in the store.

One day, waiting in line in my car, I was particularly annoyed because the car in front of me was taking too much time, according to me, for the transaction. The car finally moved on, and it was my turn to pick up my toasted multigrain bagel with plain cream cheese and large coffee cream only all with a senior discount. When it came time to pay with my perks card, the clerk told me that the person in the car in front of me had paid for my coffee. When asked, the clerk couldn't tell me who it was, but that the guy does it every day.

Now, obviously that story illustrates my stupidity and made me change my attitude, especially rash judging someone else. But the story also illustrates not only generosity but random generosity. Likewise in today's readings we have two stories about two generous women.

The widow in the first reading gives the prophet the last of the food available in her home. But to her surprise she and her son, even though they feed the prophet, seem to have enough food to last for a year until they were able to get back on their feet.

In a similar way, the widow in the gospel, the source of the expression, the "widow's mite," does not consider her own needs first, but wants to make sure that she contributes to the temple because she, too, like the widow in the first reading wanted to take care of the needs of others before taking care of her own needs.

There is an essential element to generosity. We cannot practice generosity until we have a grateful heart. If we cannot express gratitude for what we have and if we do not recognize that we have been given so much, we will then mistakenly believe that we have a right to what we have.

We can speak about three kinds of givers. The grudge giver says: "I hate to give." This person gives reluctantly and with a certain amount of resentment.

The duty givers say: "I ought to give." Even though like the reluctant, they do give with a sense of true obligation.

The thanks givers say: "I want to give." They give freely and from the heart.

Obviously, the widows in the readings today count themselves among the third group. They did not give under constraint, nor out of obligation, but gave from the heart.

Hearing these stories and these definitions, we can easily question our generosity. You see, sometimes when we give grudgingly of our time, talent, or money, we feel that we will be criticized or penalized in some way if we do not give. Again, if we give dutifully, we give out of obligation rather than out of a sense of generosity.

We should always give out of a sense of thanks because we have been blessed in so many ways. November gives us many opportunities to give thanks. For example, this week we will celebrate Veterans' Day, a day to commemorate those who gave their lives, their greatest gift, so that we might have freedom and life. We celebrate the civic feast of Thanksgiving in just a few weeks, another opportunity for us to respond generously to those in need.

The women in today's readings had no surplus, but they gave from their need. Our giving from our need will not change the world overnight, but giving will change us. Changing ourselves is as difficult as changing the world.

If you are not sure about the value of generosity, especially God's generosity to us, remember this

We ask for a flower; he gives us a bouquet

We ask for a drop of water; he gives us lakes and rivers

We ask for a blade of grass; he gives us a lawn

We ask for something to eat; he gives us his own body and blood.