

Weekend Readings & Reflections

November 6-7, 2021 – Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection: *We must live by the obedience of faith, a faith that shows itself in works of charity and self-giving (see [Galatians 5:6](#)). That's the lesson of the two widows in today's liturgy. The widow in the First Reading isn't even a Jew, yet she trusts in the word of Elijah and the promise of his Lord. Facing sure starvation, she gives all that she has, her last bit of food—feeding the man of God before herself and her family. The widow in the Gospel also gives all that she has, offering her last bit of money to support the work of God's priests in the Temple. In their self-sacrifice, these widows embody the love that Jesus last week revealed as the heart of the Law and the Gospel. They mirror the Father's love in giving His only Son, and Christ's love in sacrificing Himself on the Cross. Again in today's Epistle, we hear Christ described as a new high priest and the suffering servant foretold by Isaiah. On the Cross, He made sacrifice once and for all to take away our sin and bring us to salvation (see [Isaiah 53:12](#)). And again we are called to imitate His sacrifice of love in our own lives. We will be judged, not by how much we give—for the scribes and the wealthy contribute far more than the widow. Rather, we will be judged by whether our gifts reflect our livelihood, our whole beings, all our heart and soul, mind and strength. Are we giving all that we can to the Lord—not out of a sense of forced duty, but in a spirit of generosity and love (see [2 Corinthians 9:6–7](#))? Do not be afraid, the man of God tells us today. As we sing in today's Psalm, the Lord will provide for us, as He sustains the widow. Today, let us follow the widows' example, doing what God asks, confident that our jars of flour will not grow empty, nor our jugs of oil run dry.*



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Let's begin in Prayer:

All: Heavenly Father, you know my needs. Help me to, like the widow, be willing to entrust my well-being into your providential care as I look to care for the needs of others around me. Amen

Leader: *A widow in Jesus's time would have been considered an outcast in society. With no man to own property, home, or earn an income, she would struggle to survive. And yet, with great humility and great courage, she still presents herself in the Temple, showing her faith in the God of mercy. She trusts in God's word, and she hopes in His promise. And she gives all that she has. Jesus notices. He notices the ways in which we empty ourselves when we don't think we have anything more to give and he will give us many graces for our quiet humility and generosity. And yet, how often do we want others to think that we "have it all together?" We go to great lengths to make it seem like everything is perfect in our lives. Someone once said, "Never judge the inside of one of your relationships based on the outside of someone else's." We all put up facades. But, as we will hear today, this is the sin of the scribes and Pharisees. It is displeasing to God when we only care about our outward appearances. He wants us to give ourselves wholly to him, including both our strengths and weaknesses, our pain and our joy. Let us start today by listening to Jim Beckman reflect on the power of emptiness that Jesus shares in today's Gospel.*

Humility is the Key to Prayer

Through the gift and virtue of humility, we are able to recognize ourselves as we are. We don't see ourselves as being more or less than what we actually are. If we have this humility, we will immediately notice our own emptiness and our dependence upon God. This humility will gently draw us to our knees in a place of prayer. If you are finding that you are struggling to pray, ask God for the grace of humility.

FIRST READING ~ 1 Kings 17:10-16 ~

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." She left to get it, and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread." She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid. Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son. For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, "The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well; the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

Behind the scenes of the first reading is a show of strength by God (Yahweh) over the worshippers of Baal (the god of fertility, rain, nature). Ahaz, the King of Israel, married Jezebel, allowed her to import her Baal priests and eventually she attempted to convert everyone to Baal worship. Elijah showed God's strength by killing the priests of Baal and then proclaiming a drought as punishment on the land and teaching them that Yahweh is more powerful than Baal. Elijah himself has become hungry and thirsty. God tells him to go to Zarephath. This town was 'enemy' territory as it was the home of Jezebel's Father! He would be met by a woman who would help him. A widow is on her last meal and desperate for survival. Open to God and showing hospitality she responds to Elijah. Her response is blessed by God... 'she was able to eat for a year...'

- *Imagine this scene. Reflect on the obedience and trust of both Elijah and the widow. Do you trust God? How could you show it?*
- *Why do you think the widow does what Elijah asks? Has there ever been a time when someone unexpectedly helped you?*

SECOND READING ~ 2 Hebrews 9:24-28 ~

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice. Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment, so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

The Letter to the Hebrews paints a picture of the special Feast of Atonement described in Lev 16. The Priest would take blood into the Tent (Holy of Holies) and cover the mercy seat with blood to represent forgiveness of sins. The Priest would then appear at the entrance to the tent and announce forgiveness. Jesus has entered not a tent but heaven and His own blood has been offered as a sacrifice to take away sin. He will return - not to take away sin - but to welcome all those who eagerly await him.

- *Do you look forward to Jesus' second coming? Does Sunday Mass give you an experience of salvation and atonement when the priest is holding up the Gift of our reconciliation and communion with God?*

GOSPEL ~ Mark 12:38-44 ~

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation." He 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."

Scribes were experts at knowing and interpreting the religious laws of the Jewish People. When a Husband died, a widow was vulnerable and often without support if a brother in law did not choose to marry her. With few legal rights, scribes at times became care-takers of widow's property. They were supposed to protect the vulnerable but often devoured the house and property of widows charging a commission for their services. At the same time, they pretended to be holy and continued to wear their temple garb into the streets to attract attention. Jesus does not condemn the role of someone interpreting the laws but invites authenticity.

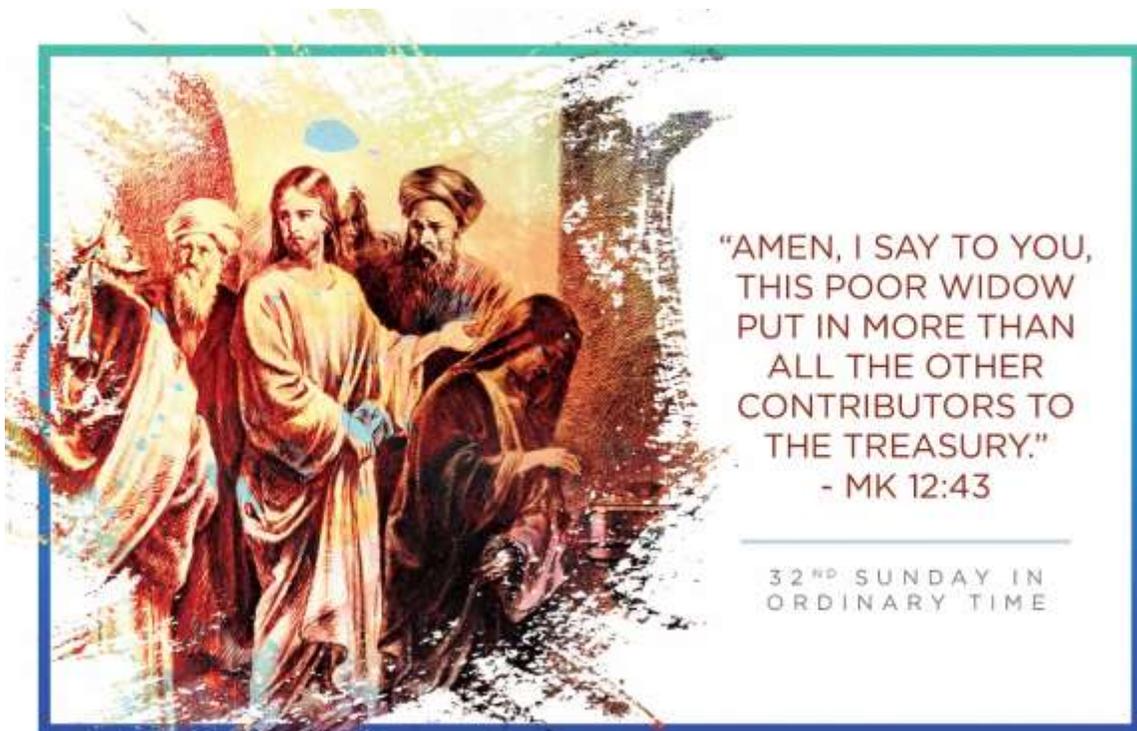
- *Who today is a modern widow - vulnerable and in need of care? In what ways would Jesus' words challenge the Church, Priests, Theologians, Lawyers, Politicians? In what way today do people behave like the scribes, the rich, the widow?*

The treasury was 13 trumpet shaped containers that collected the coins, tithes and contributions of people at the Temple. A poor widow places all she has, in contrast to rich people giving to God something of their surplus.

- *Do you think God is honored by laws, lengthy prayers, long robes, large sums... or the complete total trust and surrender of the poor widow with her 2 cents?*

Jesus now leaves the Temple and walks toward the event of his total and complete self-giving to the Father for the salvation of the world. Like the widows in the readings today he will hold nothing back from God.

- *What do you think it means to give all that you are and have to God? What is something you can do today to make this happen?*



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- MK 12:43

32ND SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

MEDITATION

What is true religion and devotion to God? Jesus warns His disciples against the wrong kind of religion. In His denunciation of the scribes (the religious experts of His day), He warns against three things: the desire for prominence and first place of honor rather than lowly service for the benefit of others; the desire for deference and recognition (and seeking esteem from others) rather than seeking to promote the good of others through humble service and selfless care for others; and thirdly, attempting to use one's position (even a religious position) for self-gain and self-advancement. True religion is relating rightly to God and to one's neighbor with love, honor, and respect. The Lord puts His Holy Spirit within us that we may be filled with the joy of His presence, the joy of true worship, and the joy of selfless giving and love for others. True reverence for God frees the heart to give liberally, both to God and to neighbor.

Jesus taught his disciples a dramatic lesson in generous giving with love and devotion. Love doesn't calculate - it spends lavishly! Jesus drove this point home to his disciples while sitting in the temple and observing people offering their tithes. Jesus praised a poor widow who gave the smallest of coins in contrast with the rich who gave greater sums.

Jesus taught that real giving must come from the heart. A gift that is given with a grudge or for display loses most of its value. But a gift given out of love, with a spirit of generosity and sacrifice, is invaluable. The amount or size of the gift doesn't matter as much as the cost to the giver. The poor widow could have kept one of her coins, but instead she recklessly gave away all she had! Jesus praised someone who gave barely a penny - how insignificant a sum - because it was everything she had, her whole living. What we have to offer may look very small and not worth much, but if we put all we have at the Lord's disposal, no matter how insignificant it may seem, then God can do with it and with us what is beyond our reckoning.

- *How can someone in poverty give more than someone who has ample means?*
- *Do you know the joy and freedom of giving liberally to God and to neighbor with gratitude and love?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray ...

ALL: Lord Jesus, all that I have is yours. Take my life, my possessions, my time and all that I have and use them as you desire for your glory. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlaitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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