

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time



Widows were especially vulnerable individuals during biblical times, particularly due to cultural norms and little social support. Along with orphans, widows tend to represent those on the margins of society who are powerless and the least among all. God, however, holds a different view of those who have fallen upon hard times.

This Sunday's first reading describes a widow who hit rock bottom. Isolated and desperate, she is greeted at her home by the prophet Elijah who asks for a favor:

*"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."*

Bishop Robert Barron explores the incredible timing of Elijah's intervention as he notes, "There is a very important biblical principle on display here—namely, the divine comes into our lives often precisely at this moment of our greatest vulnerability and need. When the ego is riding high, confident in its own power and resources, it rarely reaches out to God. But, when the ego is knocked around, wounded, and powerless, that is when God often comes in."

As people in recovery from the family spiritual disease of addiction, we have likely experienced this divine timing come as we hit our own personal bottom and sought help. Coming to this point is often necessary for us to pursue a new way of life. When we feel powerful, we are more likely to keep God at bay. When we come to the end of our rope, we are more likely to persevere through the honest spiritual work of the Twelve Steps. It helps when we are pulled from our isolation and surrounded by others who can share the fruits of recovery.

Notice how Elijah approached the widow. Rather than providing her with something, he asks her to give him a cup of water and a portion of her remaining bread. This proves to be a spiritually significant paradox that foreshadows Jesus' approach to the woman at the well. In times of desperation, God asks us to give of what we have. As the Saint Francis Prayer suggests, "It is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. It is in dying that we are born to eternal life." The widow and her son were saved by the grace and guidance of God, which prevented the jar of flour from going empty and the jug of oil from running dry. All things are possible for God.

Last Sunday, we heard Jesus recite an important Jewish prayer when asked which is the first of all the commandments. “The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” We see this principle put into practice by those who are in a place of humility and in proper relationship with God.

This Sunday’s Gospel reading contrasts the offering of a widow with the status and honor sought by religious authorities. Jesus engaged the crowd around him:

*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.”*

Reflection Questions

- How do you keep the memory of your own personal rock bottom fresh in your mind? How does this benefit your recovery?
- How has expressing your powerlessness helped you in moments of great need?
- How is God calling you to give all of yourself today?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: 1 Kings 17:10-16

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28

Gospel: Mark 12:38-44