



THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year B

1 Kings 17: 10-16
Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

Gathering

(An unlit candle and two pots of soil rest on a table in the gathering place. One pot is filled with hard dirt cluttered with stones, the other one with fresh, soft potting soil.)

This week our encounter with two biblical widows calls us to look at poverty for the scourge it is, even as it invites us to deep respect for the fidelity of these women in the midst of their destitution. These scriptures also invite us to look at poverty mindful of the special opportunities it offers for the poor and the rich. Last week we learned to seek strength from God in loving others. How did your response to others strengthen you this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members listen in silence to "The Cry of the Poor." It may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, a member of the community prays as follows on behalf of all.)

Member: "Unless I see Jesus in the poor I will not be able to stand by them,...Unless you are really in love with Jesus, you

will not be able to stand by them...”

“Jesus made the poor the hope of salvation for you and for me. He said that ‘whatever you did to the least of My brethren you did it to Me.’ ”

“I See Christ in every person I touch because He said, ‘I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, I was sick, I was suffering, I was homeless, and you took me in.’ ”¹

(The community pauses for another minute of silence.)

HEARING THE LORD’S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

Two women, two broken hearts, two desolate situations. Are they desolate or fruitful? The two widows we encounter this week deserve to be regarded with profound respect and a sense of wonder. We meet them in events of ordinary life: baking the usual meager meal, bringing a meager offering. But this time the ordinary becomes extraordinary. The bit of flour and the oil are all that is left for the one widow’s survival. The two small coins of another widow are the only means left for “her whole livelihood”.

Are you not surprised by their actions? Would you have done the same? Elijah promised that “the jar of flour shall not be empty, nor the jug of

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oil run dry". The widow did not ask any question; she simply trusted. She could not have developed such a deep trust in God's word in that very moment. The death of her husband made her a destitute in a society where women received their support only from fathers or husbands. She did not grow resentful, but instead she embraced poverty with determination. Her life was a new uncluttered soil, where to cultivate her womanly love, in God's care. And the harvest was bountiful: a heart fully matured beyond selfishness, a heart fully matured for God's grace.

Another widow follows her example – responding in a different time, to a different call. Even as he laments a corrupt system that would reduce her to destitution, Jesus blesses the wholeness of the widow's offering. God's grace will follow. Her harvest will be bountiful too.

In life we encounter many kinds of poverty: material, intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Poverty can present itself like a scourge that needs to be addressed by whoever holds some responsibility, personally and structurally. Additionally, embraced in a spirit of faith and hope in God's care, our own personal poverty, whatever it might be, can become a fertile poverty for the realization of the bounty of God in our lives.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What is your own first reaction when you encounter those in need?
- ◆ How has emptiness in your life opened you to God?
- ◆ What kind of poverty concerns you most? Why?
- ◆ How do you nurture your trust in God when you feel poor?
- ◆ What responsibility do you feel to help people less fortunate than you?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?" "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Invite a recent widow/widower to your home for dinner. In the grace before the meal, pray for the deceased and for your guest.
- ◆ Set aside ten minutes each day this week for reflection and prayer. Be in touch with the empty places in your life. Let your prayer be: “Fill me with what I most need, O Lord. Fill me with your life and love.”
- ◆ Visit Catholic Relief Services at www.crs.org/microfinance to learn how small loans to women can bring life to very poor remote rural communities. Support the effort.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, members join in singing “The Cry of the Poor”. When the song is complete, a member leads the community in prayer as follows. To each invocation, members respond, “Amen.”)

Member: “The poor people are very great people. They can teach us so many beautiful things...We must know them, they are very loveable people, they are great people, they are Jesus in the distressing disguise.”¹

(Members join hands to pray the Lord’s Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)

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