



Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time B November 11, 2018

Two generous widows who gave their all are held up as models of Christian giving for all of us

Our first reading today features the widow of Zarephath who offers hospitality to the prophet Elijah and gives him some food when she has very little left for herself and her son. The Gospel features a poor widow who gives two coins to the collection at the Temple. Jesus says “she gave more than all the rest” because she gave from her want and not from her need. The following are some reflections on these stories. The first reflections are by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

When Giving Becomes a Sacrifice

All giving is good—just as all money is good. But like money, some giving is copper, some is silver, and some is pure gold.

The test of a gift is not the amount in itself, but what its loss means to the giver. One kind of giving is when the giver gives what he/she can live without. This kind of giving doesn't really hurt. Most of our giving probably falls into this category. It is not to be dismissed. All giving is good.

But there is another kind of giving, namely, when the gift is as desperately needed by the giver as by the receiver. This kind of giving hurts. A real *sacrifice* is involved. This giving stands apart. This giving is pure gold.

This is generosity indeed. This involves giving away what one needs oneself rather than out of one's excess.

We have two further examples of it in today's scripture readings. Both examples concern very poor people - two widows. In biblical times widows were the poorest of the poor.

We wonder how someone who as poor as the widow in the gospel was able to perform an act of such spontaneous goodness. One needs to have been faithful over many years to the practice of generosity to have a heart like hers. It is not achieved by a few great deeds but by a lot of little ones. It is through giving that the heart remains open and one becomes a loving person.

Giving is at the heart of Gospel. It is of the very essence of Christianity.

Stories of Generous Giving

1. A priest, who was chaplain to young offenders in a Dublin prison, tells the following story. One day a

prisoner by the name of Tommy came up to him. Tommy was about twenty-two. It was his first time in prison. He was serving a six-month sentence.

“What's up, Tommy?” the priest asked.

“Father, would you do me a favour?” Tommy said.

“Of course,” the priest answered.

He was expecting the usual kind of request: Would you phone home, or would you phone my girlfriend—something of that kind. Instead Tommy said, “Father, would you take all my money out of my account, and send it to the fund for Aoife at St. Luke's hospital.”

Aoife was a little girl who had cancer. Tommy had read about her case in a newspaper, and how they were trying to raise money so that she could have an operation.

The prisoners get a small weekly allowance (at that time it was a meagre 7 Euros) that they can spend in the prison shop, or save for when they are released. Tommy had about 160 Euros in his account.

“Why are you doing this?: the priest asked.

“I'm doing it because I have a little daughter, aged three. If anything happened to her I'd die.”

“Are you sure you want me to take it all out?” the priest asked.

“I am, Father,” Tommy replied.

The priest sent off the money. A lovely letter of thanks came back. Six months later the priest was driving home when he saw Tommy and his little daughter walking hand in hand. He slowed down and beeped the horn. Tommy came over and said to him, “I'm out, Father, and I'm not going back.”

2. Mother Teresa told a story how one day she was walking down the street when a beggar came up to her and said, “Mother Teresa, everybody is giving to you, I also want to give to you. Today, for the whole day, I got only thirty cents. I want to give it to you.”

Mother Teresa thought for a moment: “If I take the thirty cents he will have nothing to eat tonight, and if I don't take it, I will hurt his feelings. So I put out my hands and I took the money. I have never seen such joy on anybody's face as I saw on the face of that beggar man at the thought that he too could give to Mother Teresa.”

Mother Teresa went on: “It was a big sacrifice for that poor man, who had sat in the sun all day long and received only thirty cents. It was beautiful. Thirty cents

is such a small amount, and I can get nothing with it, but as he gave it up and I took it, it became like thousands because it was given with so much love.”

And she concluded: “God looks not at the size of the gift, but at the love with which it is given.”

Giving Without Losing

On one level the story in the first reading makes no sense. Indeed, it seems ridiculous and impossible. But it can be taken in another sense. Then it becomes very true, and opens up whole horizons of meaning and application.

The widow is down to the last of her food. All she has left is a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug. Yet, by sharing what she had with the prophet, it never ran out. From this we can conclude that it is possible to give without losing. In fact, in some cases not to give can be a sure way of losing what we have.

Take the example of a grain of wheat. If it is left in the barn, it remains just a grain of wheat, which in time will become moldy and decay, and then there is nothing left at all. But if it is taken out and planted, it will die, but in doing so, it will be multiplied many times over.

Take the example of a blood transfusion. A transfusion enriches the one who receives it without impoverishing the one who gives it.

Another example. If you light a candle, you can light a hundred candles from that original candle without it being diminished. It is able to share its light without losing its own.

So there is a sense in which we can share what we have without being impoverished. In fact, we are more likely to be enriched in so doing. Of course here we are not talking about material things.

A teacher loses nothing of his knowledge by sharing it with his pupils. A mother loses nothing of her love by sharing it with her children.

We can share such things as knowledge, love, peace, and so on, with others without our own supply of these being in any way diminished. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case. Giving liberates the soul of the giver. The giver is as enriched as the recipient.

Giving brings its own reward. It is through giving that the heart remains open and one becomes a loving person. When we give cheerfully, and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.

Brian Keenan, who was held hostage in Lebanon for several years, gives us a further example. He says that if one kept to oneself, was totally wrapped up in oneself, never thinking of one’s fellow hostages, or caring about them, or sharing with them...that was a recipe for disaster. It drove one into oneself, and one became gloomy and

self-preoccupied. He says, “It is through what we give that we survive.”

“Love is like a basket of loaves and fishes: you never have enough until you start to give it away” (Anon).

Story

Many people are familiar with the story of fifteen-year-old Jewish girl, Anne Frank. The diary she kept in captivity has been translated into dozens of languages. A year before she died in a Nazi concentration camp, she wrote in her diary:

“Give of yourself. You can always give something, even if it is only kindness. No one ever became poor from giving.”

It’s an amazing statement coming from one so young, especially when one considers the circumstances in which she was living at the time.

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Real Piety

The following reflection is by Fr. Denis McBride, CSSR.

The story of the widow’s generosity is well placed at this stage in Mark’s Gospel. The poor widow typifies what Jesus will do himself: give everything as an offering to God. When Jesus is finished giving, there will be nothing left for him to give. He gives his all. That is the reality of his piety.

Jesus hopes that his own disciples will take their cue from that example of real piety, not from the scribe’s hungry of status and honour. He hopes that we, his followers, will be equally generous with our own resources. Those resources are not always measured in money. We are called on to give of our time, our talent, our understanding. We are asked to give not just from our abundance but from our substance. That kind of giving always hurts, because we feel all spent after it.

Like the widow, we might feel that we have nothing more to give; but it’s that kind of giving that counts with Jesus.

Everyday demands are made on us. We are called on to be generous with our love, our forgiveness, our patience, our resources. And the Good News is that when we do that out of love, Jesus will be our constant support. No matter who the prosecuting counsel turns out to be when our case comes up, Jesus will be leading for the defense.

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Have a blessed week,

