

## Thirty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about self-giving. They show that the one who freely and heartfelt gives to God will receive a hundredfold in turn. They invite us to be open to the need of our fellows and to give without counting so that we receive from the Lord his countless blessings.

The first reading of the Book of Kings describes the generous giving of the widow of Zarephat toward Elijah in a very critical moment of famine in the country. In fact, as the prophet asked her to give him a piece of bread to eat, the widow did not hesitate to use the last measure of flour left for her son and for herself and to prepare him a cake. As she willingly did it, her jar of flour never emptied and her jug of oil never ran dry, so that she was able to find food for herself and her son for the whole year.

What is behind this text is the idea that a giving made to God, as small as it might be, can become for us a source of blessing. There is also in the text the idea that what counts most before God is not the quantity of what we offer, but the quality of the heart that gives.

All this helps us understand today's Gospel as Jesus praises the widow who, unlike the rich people, has given only two small coins in the treasury of the temple. First of all, the Gospel starts with a warning with regard to the behavior of Scribes who want to show up in what they do in order to be seen by the people. Because they act in such a way, they will not escape God's condemnation.

The Gospel talks also about Jesus' praise of the poor widow. It shows that while many rich people gave a lot of money in the treasury of the temple, she gave only a few cents. But, for Jesus, that offering was more than all the contributors have given that day. Moreover, while the others have given of their surplus wealth, she gave out of poverty, her whole livelihood.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is the danger of the religion of show. What do I mean by that? In fact, we live in a culture where the show plays a big role and people like it well. The Show is important for our making as society because it contributes to our entertainment and relaxation. However, there is a danger that such activity, as important as it is, might be transferred at the spiritual level.

If it happens that way, then, our religious practice becomes unconsciously a practice for the show, a religion we perform in order to be seen and to be appreciated. This danger is real and we should not minimize it; because it can really happen that what we do, we do it so that people may see how we pray and are devout people.

That is the danger Jesus denounces in the Gospel in the behavior of the scribes. But, it means also that true religion is that of the heart, that which cares more for the conversion of heart before God than that of self-justification before men and which finds its pleasure in external devotion without the conversion of heart.

The second thing I want to highlight is the value of our offering before God. In fact, it is very striking that Jesus praises the poor widow who has not given too much in the treasury of the temple.

Of course, Jesus does not say that the offerings of the other contributors were not significant. If that is the case, then, where is the problem? The problem is all about the heart that gives. That is why the Gospel contrasts the attitude of the scribes who are full of themselves and take advantage of their situation from that of the poor widow who is humble and counts only on God. For Jesus, indeed, the tiny contribution of the widow was more important than that of the others. While the others had given what they could spare easily enough and still have plenty left, she has given everything she had.

In that perspective, we can say that what matters most is not the amount or the size of the gift we give, but rather the heart that is generous and the sacrifice we accept by doing it. It is like what we do with our children: we give everything to them with generosity and joy until it hurts.

The truth is that the woman would have given one coin and kept another, probably for tomorrow. And yet, she gave everything she had without hesitation or reservation. There is here a symbolic truth, namely that we have to surrender completely to God. When we act this way, God will certainly bless us in turn with many gifts in our life.

That is why even when we do not have plenty of things to give, we have always to remember that even our small gift is worthwhile before God. What we put at his disposal, so small as it might be, can become a fortune in his eyes and for the glory of his name. In giving, there is no shame, provided it is done from the heart. How would God refuse a gift done with the whole heart?

Jesus himself gives us a strong example of self-giving to the point of dying on the cross for our salvation. That is why the letter to the Hebrews salutes him as our High Priest who has entered the sanctuary of God with his own blood for our salvation. He takes away our sins and will come again to bring salvation to us who eagerly await him. We ask him to help us to be generous with our love, our forgiveness, our time, our patience and our resources. We ask him to help us give everything we can for the glory of his name. May God bless you all!

**1 Kings 17: 10-16; Hebrews 9: 24-28; Mark 12: 38-44**



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