

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

The readings of this Sunday talk about our donations to God. They show that the one who freely and heartfelt gives to God will receive back much more in turn. They invite us to be open to the needs of our fellows and to give without counting the cost so that we receive from God his countless blessings.

The first reading describes the generosity of the widow of Zarephat toward the prophet Elijah. It shows how, when there was famine in the country, she did not hesitate to give to Elijah a piece of bread to eat as he asked for. It also shows that as she acted unselfishly, forgetting her own hunger and that of her son, God blessed her with an abundance of food.

What is behind this text is the idea that any good deed done to others in the name of our faith in God will never remain unrewarded. Another idea is that the generosity shown to our fellow human beings attracts God's blessings upon us. The last idea is relative to the truth that what counts most is not the quantity of what we offer to God, but the righteousness of the heart that gives to him.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus praises the poor widow for his small offering in the temple. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' warning about the behavior of the Scribes who like to show up in what they do in order to be seen by the people. Then, it talks about the condemnation they will receive because of this bad behavior.

After that, the Gospel talks about Jesus' praise and appreciation of the poor widow. It explains in particular the reason why he did so by declaring that, while all other rich contributors in the temple's treasury gave of their surplus wealth, she, on the contrary, out of her poverty, gave all she had as a livelihood.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the offering that is pleasing to God. What do I mean by that? First of all, let me start with an observation. In fact, we live in a culture where the show plays a big role and people like it as well as myself.

The Show, indeed, is important for our making as a 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 in our spirituality.

If it happens that way, it can influence our religious practice so that we perform our religion in order to be seen and to be appreciated by the people. This danger is real and we should not minimize it. It can really happen that we fulfill a number of religious practices so that people may see how we pray and are devout people.

Such a danger is what Jesus denounces in the behavior of the scribes. It does not mean that, in themselves, scribes were bad guys, the problem is that everything they did was external, done in order to be seen. One would say that they cared more about how they appeared than about what they truly were. In that context, if an offering is given to God with the spirit of the Scribes, then, it is not guided by the idea of giving back to God freely, humbly and with gratitude from the many gifts received from his hands, but as a mark of show because of what one possesses.

That is why Jesus is praising the poor widow who has not given much in the treasury of the temple, but the little she has given, has been with the whole of her heart. Of course, Jesus does not say that the offerings of the other contributors were not significant.

If so, where is the problem, then? The problem is all about the dispositions of the heart of the one who offers. It is for that reason that Jesus contrasts the attitude of the scribes who are full of themselves and take advantage of their situation from that of the 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 had given everything she had. In that perspective, Jesus shows clearly that what matters most is not the amount or the size of the gift given in the name of our faith, but rather the heart that is generous and the sacrifice accepted in doing it. It is like what the parents do for their children, namely giving with joy and generosity everything they have for the good of their children, even if it hurts.

In the same way, the sacrifice of the widow is total and complete, without reservation and calculation, just done freely and joyfully from the bottom of the heart. She certainly would have given one coin and kept another, probably for her survival for tomorrow. But, she gave everything she had without hesitation or reservation.

There is a symbolic truth here, namely that we have to surrender completely to God what we are and what we have. 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 truth, 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.

Let us ask him to help us to be generous with our love, our forgiveness, our time, our patience and our resources. Let us 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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