

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B ~ November 8, 2015

Last Sunday on the Solemnity of All Saints, I talked about how the saints encourage us by their example of life. They show us that it is possible to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbor as our self. Now because of the Solemnity of All Saints, we did not have the usual reading from Mark's Gospel last Sunday, but if we would have, it was that famous reading about the scribe asking Jesus which is the most important Commandment. And you know His response, it is actually two that go together: To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. In today's Gospel passage, we see someone who fulfills those Commandments of love, who gives herself fully—fully to God and on behalf of others. And in fact, she would have gone unnoticed that day in the Temple except Jesus sees her. Everybody else is focusing on the wealthy folks and their fine clothes and their big sums of money that come up and deposit those in the Temple treasury. No one sees this widow except Jesus and He points her out to His disciples. And as He does so, He says that her gift is greater than all the rest because she is not giving something from her surplus, she is giving really the gift of herself to God, the gift of herself to God.

Often, this story is called "The Widow's Mite" reflecting the smallness of her gift, but I think it should be renamed "The Widow's Might", because she who had no power in her society, had incredible power to influence others by this sacrifice of love. In fact, she, I believe, is a source of encouragement to Jesus as He goes forward to the Cross. Because in the context of Mark's Gospel, this is the last time Jesus will be in the Temple. He is in Jerusalem, a few days away from offering His life completely to God. And seeing how this widow does this so freely and generously, I am sure it was able to spur him on to take that very challenging step of giving Himself completely to God on the Cross, on our behalf and out of love of neighbor as well. She is a source of encouragement to Him. She has that power to influence others by her gift.

There are these kinds of generous gifts going on all around us if we but have eyes of faith to see them. People are giving not of their surplus, but giving really gifts that symbolize the gift of themselves completely to God and in service and love of their neighbor. My first week here at [Holy Spirit] back in January 2014, I remember opening my mail in my office and there was an envelope from a family at St. Eugene's that I knew fairly well. The parents, the two parents, working six days a week at a low-paying job, making great sacrifices so that their children could obtain a Catholic education. And as I opened the envelope, a note fell out with a \$10 check saying "Father, please put this in your new church building fund." I was taken aback, I mean, they don't have that to give but they gave it. And then it came the next month, and the next month, and every month since—an incredible gift of generosity from this family who is not even connected to us but through Christ and through His sacrificial love.

Or I think about the recent celebration of Oktoberfest when for the first time we threw open the doors of our parish and welcomed others from outside our community to come and to celebrate with us in order to raise money for our new church fund and it was about something much more than just raising money. I remember when the committee told me earlier this year that they were planning for 500 people. I didn't tell them this but the thought passed my mind, "This is the first year: I think 500 might be a little high." But you know, 500 showed up that night. Even though there were some kinks the first time around that will be worked out next year, those who came had a great time, a great time, and there was much joy and celebration that night, and people from other parishes and even people who weren't Catholic were here to enjoy the generosity of our hospitality. And there were those who worked alongside each other: newcomers and people who have been here a long time, you know, Hispanics and Anglos and Asian and African-Americans, all with one goal: Just to give themselves fully to this important project on behalf of the Church but ultimately for the Glory of God. And I remember one "couple of advanced wisdom"—another way for saying they are a little older than most of us—who here until midnight helping to clean up after that celebration—such generosity, such generosity.

Or, I think about the recent project of enclosing our pavilion, making it into a new classroom building. Such commitment on behalf of the leadership team and vision to really direct that project. And the core group of people who were here on most Saturdays, giving of themselves, more than just nails and building a physical building, but really building up a community of faith. Hearing Spanish being spoken next to English as Christians worked side-by-side, on a project together, encouraging each other. And

there was even one unlikely source of encouragement to all of us who persevered in that project. It came from a teenager who was here practically every Saturday for four months, usually the first one here and the last one to go in the afternoon, and he came during the week as well. He just poured his heart and soul into the project. For him it was more than building a building, it was just an expression of love for God and love for his neighbors here in our parish. That kind of sacrificial giving was a real inspiration to others who came to give of themselves to the project as well.

I think of our new candidates and catechumens here who become before us this day to enter into a whole-hearted commitment to become one with us in our Catholic faith and who reveal to us something we often forget: We have such an abundance in our church, blessings through the sacraments and the saints, and our moral teaching, and just all the riches of our faith that we often take for granted but that others have to point out to us by their offering of themselves, saying that they want to be part of this living Body of Christ.

There are all sorts of signs of generosity and sacrificial love all around us if we but put on the eyes of Jesus and see as He sees all these incredible acts of the "Widow's Mite". I think of couples who are by each other's side in good and difficult times, times of sickness and health, times when things are going really well and times when it is very challenging, who are faithful and true, and continue to pour out their lives for each other. I think of parents who give so much to their children and even on those days when they don't find their children likable, they still love them, they still give themselves to their children, they still make those daily sacrifices of love that enable their children to know that they are loved. Or, adult children who are caring for their aging parents, parents who sometimes have lost their mind, who can no longer remember what is going on or perhaps have lost their physical capability to even move or go anywhere on their own—adult children there by their side, walking with them, supporting them, strengthening them, loving them. Or, friends who care for friends in times of great loss, sorrow, for those in this parish who have reached out to welcome others who perhaps have been away or just coming for the first time.

There are all sorts of people giving of themselves in love to others who are actually encouraging others to do the same. And all of this gift-giving, all this generosity, all this sacrificial love really flows from one gift that we celebrate every time we come to this altar of praise. It is the gift of the life of the Son of God who holds nothing back, who gives Himself fully and freely to us. And who simply yet powerfully says, "This is My Body given for you, this is My Blood poured out for you." So that we might have the strength, the energy, the courage to do the same, to say to others "This is my body, my life that's broken open for you" and find that there's so much more of ourselves to give away. "This is My Blood, My Very Life that I pour out for you" and to discover there is so much more to share. And slowly but surely we discover the truth that all widows of faith know: That with God, the jar of flour, it never goes empty – the jug of oil, it will never go dry.