

## Commentary to the Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary B

### Trusting in God



In the first reading today and in the Gospel reading we meet two widows who are similar. Both are everyday, hard working women. Both are poor. Both put their trust in God. Both are rewarded for their faith.

The first widow is from Zarephath, a coastal city on the Mediterranean, northwest of the Kingdom of Israel. Elijah traveled through this land during a famine. As in all famines, the rich complain, and the poor starve. The woman was poor. When Elijah met up with her, she was putting her last scraps together before she and her son would die. Imagine her as one of the 925 million starving people in the world. Imagine her son as one of the 1.5 million children who die of starvation every year. Now a stranger goes up to this woman and asks for food in the name of the Lord. Elijah also must have been near starvation. Hospitality to strangers was a law of God. Should the widow turn from God's law or should she share the little she had? The woman put her total trust in God, and she received enough for her and her son to eat for a full year.

The second widow was the one of the Gospel reading who put two small coins into the Temple treasury. Jesus was people watching, sitting across from the treasury. There were big shows as some of the wealthy came forward letting everyone know about their great generosity. After all, the money from the wealthy had paid for most of the rebuilding of the Temple. What value did the widow's small coins have next to their thousands? But Jesus knew how much she was really giving. It was far more than two small coins. He said that her donation, although it seemed insignificant, was tremendous because she gave all that she had. Her donation was an act of putting her faith in God to care for her.

What these two widows did is extremely difficult for all of us. I know that there are many of you with great faith, but I also know that no matter how great our faith is, it is extremely difficult to put our total trust in God. There is something within us all that looks for solutions to our problems outside of the realm of faith. Perhaps as rugged individualists we think that we can solve our own problems, conquer all obstacles ourselves. Certainly, we are all tempted to believe that the proper amount of cash applied in the right places can heal all ills.

The great fallacy of our age is that money can solve our problems. It is the job of advertisers to convince us that we can buy happiness, and the advertisers have done that well. The fact is that among those who have been blessed with material success the happiest are those who trust in God not in their wealth.

The radical message of today's readings is that we must place our confidence in God rather than in our material possessions. This is difficult for us to do because it demands our practicing the forgotten virtue of humility. A humble person recognizes where he or she stands before God. A humble person recognizes his or her profound need for God. A humble person is certain that the presence of God in his or her life is fundamental to happiness.

The two widows gave from their substance. They put their trust in God shouting with their actions that his presence in their lives was infinitely more important than anything they owned, even more important than everything they owned. They give us the example of ideal Christians, humbly trusting in God.

There are times that we are deeply disappointed in our world, our American society, and even our fellow Catholics. Gospel values are ignored, or, at least, not given their proper priority. Many give life issues, from womb to tomb, equal or less weight than other issues. From grade school through college, our children are immersed in the glorification of secular values along with the subtle and not so subtle mocking of all who believe in the spiritual. We turn to the Church, but we find cold priests and bishops. Along with that we are all still reeling from scandals that are uncovered and reported ad nauseam.

When we feel disappointed we need to put our trust in God. No where in scripture did He say that His followers would be in the majority. But He did say that He would be with us. Like the two widows, we need to give Him our all. We need to put our faith and our trust in Him, and we need to be assured that He sees us; He knows us, and He cares for us.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ