

The Tale of two Widows

Our reading this weekend feature two widows. Widows during biblical times were especially vulnerable. It was because there was no social network to care for those who lost their means of economic support. It is why the prophets spoke so often about care for the widows and orphans. They were the most vulnerable in society.

In the first reading we hear the story of the Prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath and their confrontation. There was a severe famine, that according to Elijah was punishment for the Kings idolatry. As a consequence of the drought the widow of Zarephath and her son are reduced to a desperate situation. They are quite literally down to their last meal. **What we are called to consider is someone who is about as low as you can go. A widow, living in the midst of a drought and down to her last meal.** This is someone who has no visible means of support, no future, no hope. **This is when Elijah come to her. There is a very important biblical principle on display here. Namely the divine comes into our lives, often precisely at the moment of our vulnerability and need.** When a person is riding high there is little need to reach out to God. But when the person is knocked around, wounded, powerless, it is at that the moment when God often rides in. **Doesn't St. Paul make this point, when he says, "I willingly boast of my weakness" Why? "That the power of Christ might dwell in me.** Often when we feel powerful, we keep God at bay and are indifferent to God. **But hitting bottom affords us the opportunity, as it did the widow, to receive a divine grace**

Well, what does the prophet say to her, **"Please bring me a small cup of water to drink."** (An opportunity to receive a divine grace.).

Hum, does that line bring you to another scene in the new testament? **Jesus speaks to the women at the well, when he says almost the exact same thing. Remember he sits at the well and says to the Samaritan Women, "give me to drink."** **And so we come to one of the great paradox of scripture. One of the most fundamental truths of the spiritual life...Abundance comes from the willing gift. Let me say this again, "Abundance comes from the willing gift."**

Both Elijah and Jesus address women in rather desperate situations. We know about the situation of the widow of Zarephath; But the **women at the well is a triple outsider.** She is a woman, a Samaritan and a woman who had been married

multiple times and is considered an adulterer. It is why she is alone at the well at noon time, she won't be seen. Both Elijah and Jesus address women in very desperate situations and they do what? They Ask them to give! To Give? No these women need something. It is precisely then that they are asked to give.

And then, just in case we miss something, Elijah intensifies the situation and asks also for bread. When the widow protests that they have exactly one more meal before they die. This request become almost comedic...it would be funny, if it weren't so tragic. At the very bottom of her life, when she has nothing she is invite to give and give again.

Here is the great spiritual truth...When you are linked to God, who is nothing but giving. Then you can give and give and give and never run out. That it!!! That the hinge!!! When you are linked to God is who nothing but gift, then you can give and give and never run out. In fact, as Jesus spoke to the women at the well, it will become in you like water bubbling up for eternal life.

Now the flip side to that, when we cling to pathetic substitutes for God, money, sex, pleasure, power and esteem, then we can hoard and hoard and never have enough. You see to get this is to get the bible. It is what the bible talks about over and over again. That is if you turn something that isn't God into God, you can hoard it and store it up all you want and it will never be enough. But, when you are hooked onto the true God. You can give and give and give and never run out.

In the beautiful language of the story, with jar of flour will not go empty and neither will the jar of oil run dry. The widow and her son are able to eat for a year. Even after they have given every thing away. And because they have given everything away.

The bible repeats the lesson endlessly...story after story. If you want your life to increase...give it away!

If you want your faith to increase share it! If you want more joy in your life...then be bearers of joy!

Most of us get caught at this point. We panic at running out and cling to the little we have. How can we acquire more life, more faith, more joy...you see it is never a question of clinging or hoarding. It is always a question of giving away.

The gospel gives us one more take on this lesson. Jesus is at the end of his life. He is in the temple for the last time before his own death. This is a matter of fact the last lesson on that walk we have been making with him as disciples. And He speaks not only directly to his disciples but in fact, he may very well be speaking to himself. As he will face the total giving of self on the cross, where he will be asked to give out of his poverty, stripped of everything, not only clothes, but friendship from those who would deny him and a people as they turned their back on the one who would save them.

So in the Temple, in contrast, we have the scribes who cling to their places of honor and their robes of distinction. And the widow who gives her last pennies. Jesus notes that she gives out of her poverty. The Greek literally says, “she gives her life”. A widow with not means of support or hope give what little she has as an offering to God. The spiritual truth is held up again. Your spiritual being is held up in the measure you give. Jesus is held up in the measure he gave!

The women gave all she had—two coins...she could have given the one and no one would have thought any less of her...as a matter of fact they didn't think too much of her with the two coins...But she held nothing back.

She gave of her life and in perfect charity, which comes from the heart. Caritas...of the Heart, the heart that is exposed in the statues of Jesus and His sacred heart. You see true charity comes not out of excess but when we give from the heart.

So if you feel you have hit bottom...Hear this...Look for Elijah and look for the presence of the Lord and he will always invite you to give! It might mean money, but it will certainly mean giving from you heart and life!

Do this and we are guaranteed the fullness of life! So keep this two widows in mind this week and give out of your poverty.