

If I were to give titles to my homilies—I don't, but if I did—this one would be called: "The eyes of the widows are upon us." Two poor widows are prominently featured in today's readings and Jesus had positive things to say about both of them.

We just heard what Jesus said about the widow at the Temple treasury. What did he have to say about the widow of Zarephath? Do you remember when Jesus went home to Nazareth and taught in the synagogue? At first the people spoke highly of him and were amazed by his teaching, but then they began to doubt him because they thought they knew him. They wanted him to work miracles for them, like he had done elsewhere and he refused. He referred to the widow of Zarephath and to a Syrian leper—both of whom were not Jews yet God blessed them because of their faith. The double meaning in Jesus' refusal was that the people of Nazareth lacked the faith required for Jesus' to work miracles and it implied that God was going to extend his blessings to the gentiles. Jesus did not come just to save the chosen people of Israel; he came to save the entire world, but salvation requires faith in Him. Beware of the eyes of the widow of Zarephath. She was a Gentile from Sidon who had faith in a foreign Jewish prophet (Elijah). She is a challenge to all of us who struggle in our faith in Jesus.

Why do we need to beware of the eyes of the widow at the treasury? There are a couple reasons. After watching her deposit her two little pennies in the treasury, Jesus said to the disciples, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

The widow only put two little pennies into the treasury; a miniscule amount compared to what the wealthy people put in, but those two pennies represent her wholehearted dedication to God. Her whole livelihood was given over to God. She truly loved him with her entire being as we were commanded to do in last Sunday's gospel about the great commandments. She didn't have much to give, but what she did have, she offered to God.

The widow at the treasury is a challenge to us. How wholeheartedly do we offer to God whatever it is we have to give? How do we cooperate with the gifts he has given us? Do we develop them, nurture them and help them to grow and bear fruit? Or do we let them go to waste? Do we say, "What I have is too small, or I am too weak, or I don't have enough time, talent, or treasure?" The two widows had very little to offer to God. We have much more. How do we use the gifts we have been given?

When we see the pain and suffering and other problems in the world around us, it is easy to fall into despair. We need to learn something from a third woman, a poor, tiny woman who didn't have much but what she had she offered to God. In speaking to her sisters, and through them to us, Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something." Jesus will use whatever we offer to him, no matter how big or small. However, if we withhold our tiny drops, we will deny Jesus the opportunity to use them.

The widows are watching us. Mother Teresa is watching us. Jesus is watching us. When we meet him face to face, what is he going to say?