

Homily of Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146:7-10; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

1 Kings 16:29-33 summarized the disastrous reign of King Ahab. For that reason, Elijah prophesied, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, during these years there shall be no dew or rain except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). One may ask why this prophecy which would bring suffering to the people. The lesson is that when bad leaders are allowed into power or allowed to stay in power, the people suffer.

Under God's direction, Elijah went to Jordan. When the drought became severe in Jordan, God sent him to Sidon. As we read in the first reading, it was in Zarephath, Sidon, that Elijah met the widow and asked her for something to eat. The widow made it clear to Elijah how bad the situation was, "As the Lord, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a few sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." Then, Elijah assured her, "Do not be afraid. ... For the Lord, the God of Israel, says: The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth." It came to pass as Elijah prophesied (1 Kings 17:13-16).

The first reading brings to mind Jesus' words in Luke 4:25-26, "I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon." It is noteworthy that the widow who showed Elijah great generosity and trust was not an Israelite but a Canaanite. I am sure that there were families in Israel and in Sidon who were not impoverished and could have taken good care of Elijah. Yet, God chose to send Elijah to the poor widow. This means that God can use anyone for his good plan. Let us not have excuses when God wants to use us.

In many ways, God sends 'Elijah' to us. Do we share the little we have with the 'Elijah', or do we drive the 'Elijah' away?

In the gospel, Jesus says about the widow, "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" (Mark 12:43-44).

The generosity of the two poor widows are perfect examples of sacrifice and faith. Both widows, generously, gave from their whole livelihood. There are many testimonies of multiplication of 'flour' and multiplication of 'oil' after sharing with the needy and after giving for God's work. Jesus says in Luke 6:38, "Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap." We often say, "Givers never lack."

The widows teach us that the little we have and sincerely able to give is mighty in the eyes of God. Therefore, let us not hold back the little we can afford to give. Have faith in God that your jar of flour shall not go empty, nor your jug of oil run dry.

It is not only material possessions that we are invited to share with one another. We are, also, invited to, generously, share our talents, ideas, knowledge, time, understanding, care, cooperation, assistance, presence, and services.

Finally, St. Paul encourages us the best way to give, "Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do ... without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). St. Paul, further, advises us, "do everything without grumbling or questioning..." (Philippians 2:14).

There are some public donations in which the information or some information about the donations can be made public, if the giver chooses. There is nothing wrong with that. However, Jesus cautions us, "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise

of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matthew 6:1-4).

Blessed are they who sacrifice to give for the work of God and for the wellbeing of the needy; they will receive from God; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing will be poured into their lap. Their jar of flour shall not go empty, nor their jug of oil run dry. Amen.

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