

Homily for 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 11, 2018
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Zarephath at the time of Elijah was a prosperous Phoenician commercial center just south of the pagan district of Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. It was noted for its exports of wine, grain and oil but due to an extended drought was experiencing trouble. The normal economy attracted the poor who were looking to better their state in life. As always hard times affect the poor hardest. Elijah a refugee fleeing to escape the persecution of Queen Jezebel happens across a widowed woman gathering sticks. Jesus mentions this same widow in the Gospel of Luke as not being of Israel, which would make her a worshipper of the pagan god Baal. Elijah asks for food and offers her kind consoling words, "Do not be afraid." She then, a hopeless widow, supporting a young son takes in Elijah a foreign refugee a stranger. She shares with him what she believes is her last meal. In this way she fulfills the wisdom of Psalm 146 and becomes an instrument of the Lord, the God of Israel. Her charity, her sacrificial love secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, protects strangers, sustains the fatherless and the widow and raises up those who were bowed down. She becomes both savior and saved fulfilling Levitical law. Elijah then provides her sustenance fulfilling God's promise. The jar containing the

bread of life never goes empty until the rain falls from heaven and again baptizes the earth.

Today's Gospel occurs just after Jesus has cleansed the temple of the money changers who are making his Father's house into a den of thieves. Perhaps these same money changers are among those Jesus observes putting their temple tax into the treasury for the upkeep of the temple. Jesus observes them putting money into the treasury and points out that they are more interested in being seen by others in hopes of gaining popularity, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings and notoriety amongst the well to do in marketplaces and places of honor at banquets. Jesus then accurately observes the offering of the poor widow who puts in two small coins, monetarily worth only a few cents, sacrificially worth all she had. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' times the temple tax was required to be paid only by men. This poor widow contributing to the temple tax meant that no man in her life had come to her support, no savior had come to her rescue, none of those placing their money in the pot had seemingly even noticed her, no one fulfilled Levitical law to care for this widow, no one came forward to become the instrument of the Lord, the God of Israel. All this while Jesus the instrument of her salvation looks on.

The point here is not how much money we are putting in the basket. The money is necessary but not important. The point here is:

Why are we placing money in the basket and is money even enough or should we also become sowers of the seed, laborers in the field? Do we practice sacrificial love for our neighbor simply by putting in money? Are we doing anything to physically reach out to the poor, to those in need, to the refugee, the widow, the orphan? Do we personally assist the Lord in fulfilling the promises he makes in Psalm 146 or should he look for another? Who will be the provider, the instrument of the Lord for the downtrodden today?

We often sing a song called The Summons, it goes like this, “Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in you and you in me? Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same? Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen, and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?” We also hear phrases that tug at our souls, “The Lord provides” and “Make me an instrument of your peace.” The reading from Hebrews today points out that we have a God who came to us in person, a God who in his flesh gave himself up on the cross and experienced death to take away our sins by his sacrifice. Jesus holds nothing back and asks us to do the same. We are the instrument, the hands and feet, the smiles and hugs, the words of compassion and hope the Lord provides those in

need now, those who are hungry now, those who weep now. Jesus promises that the jar of his forgiveness will never go empty, that he keeps faithful forever to his promise of salvation. Jesus asks us to follow him to become instruments of self-sacrificing love to those in need now.

John's Gospel, echoing Hebrews, defines self-sacrificing love for us, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." Christ asks us for self-sacrifice, to give up our own interests or wishes in order to help others, with the pure motivation of alleviating the suffering of others. Charity is loved steeped in action. Charity is more than money it is an act of kindness and generosity to help the needy. This supreme love is suffering love, love that requires personal involvement in the knotty problems of the world, love that bears with the failings and weaknesses of others, love that is committed to helping others regardless of the cost. Christ asks us to fulfill for him the wisdom of Psalm 146 to become instruments for the Lord, the God of Israel. So that our charity, our sacrificial love secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, protects strangers, sustains the fatherless and the widow and raises up those who were bowed down. So that we become both savior

and saved fulfilling God's law of love. He promises us that the jar providing the bread of life will never go empty until he comes again from heaven and baptizes the earth. Who of us hears the call to be instruments of the Lord?