

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year B, 1 Kgs 17:10-16, Heb 9:24-28; Mk 12:38-44

### Introduction

Jesus praised a widow who gave all she had to live on. Jesus does not judge a gift by its size but by the heart and mind of the giver and what it would have cost him/her. We tend to judge our own contributions and that of others rather harshly and ungodly. We are called to examine this tendency in our lives. God loves a cheerful giver.

### Homily

On one level, at a superficial level, the story in our first reading appears ridiculous and absurd. In fact, our post-modern day ethics might view it as nonsensical, suicidal and irrational. On another level, on a spiritual and religious level, it is heavenly and divinely inspired. It is a pure wisdom of God which might sound as folly to some people. From this spiritual perspective, this story is very true and offers a wide horizon of meanings, insights and applications. The widow was down to the last of her food. All she had to live on was a handful of flour and a drop of olive oil in a jug. The demand that she shares that out would have been a very difficult and tempting one for her. She trusted God. She risked. She loved and waited. In sharing what she had to live on, her jar never ran dry and her bread never finished.

The point being made here is that it is possible to give without losing. To give can be a way of gaining. Take the example of a grain of wheat. If it is left in the barn, it remains a grain which in time would get mouldy, roty and decay. But, if it is taken and planted, it multiplies several times over. Another example is candle. If you light a candle, you can from that original candle light several other candles without reducing the flame or the energy from that first candle. So, there is a sense in which we can share what we have without being impoverished. In fact, if we do we become richer and happier and we feel like we are fulfilling God's ultimate plan for us because we are being his co-creators. Of course we are not referring here to material gifts alone as important as that is, we are also referring to the gift of oneself. For instant, the teacher is being generous when he/she shares knowledge with the students. The medical worker is being charitable when his/her work is seen as a vocation and when he/she dedicates him/her self beyond official work demands to care for the sick and needy. Priests and Religious who share their whole lives with the people of God, sacrificing personal comfort and achievements/ambitions are classical examples. A mother loses nothing of her love by sharing this with her children, family and friends and even foes alike. Instead of losing, she multiplies it and spreads it all the more through the agency of those who first received from her. Love and charity is like bread

and fish, you never have enough until you start sharing what you have. Giving liberates the soul of the giver.

The test of a gift is not in what it amounts to in itself, but what its loss means to the receiver. We have to give what will cost us something. This is not just merely giving what we can do without but what we find extremely difficult to live without or what we don't want to do without. This sort of gift hurts us as we part with it. But this is love in action. When the gift is desperately needed by the giver as much as by the receiver, that is true giving and that is when our gift becomes real sacrifice.

Mother Theresa told a story of how one day she was walking down the street, and a weary looking beggar ran up to her and said "Mother Theresa, everyone gives you something, I want to give you something also. Today and for the whole day, I got thirty cents. I want to give it to you". Mother Theresa thought quickly to herself 'if I accept this money, he will not have anything to eat this night. If I don't, he will feel rejected and hurt'. I stretched out my hand and accepted the money with gratitude. I have never seen such a joy on anybody's face as I saw on the face of that beggar man at the thought that he too could give to Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa went on, it was a big sacrifice for that man who had sat on the Sun all day long and received only 30 cents. Thirty cents is such a small amount, but as he gave it and I took it, it looked like thousands because it was given with so much love. God looks not at the greatness of the work but at the Love with which it is done or given. This kind of goodness is not achieved by waiting to do great deeds that made headlines or merit national awards, but by few little and simple/ordinary deeds. This is the type that St. Therese of the Child Jesus (Lisieux) lived. Blessed Oscar Romero, the highly celebrated Archbishop of El-Sabador who was shot while celebrating Mass in his Cathedral parish wrote:

"We are workers, it helps now and again to take a step back and take a long view. We accomplish in our life time only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is called 'God's work'. This is what we are about, we plant the seed that will one day grow. We water seeds that are already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeasts that produce effects beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in just realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way. An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers not master builders. We are ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own".