

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(1 King 17:10-16 / Mark 12:38-44)
07.11.2021

Dear brothers and sisters

In both readings we have just heard, there is a widow!

In the first reading, there is the widow who made a little scone from her meal and brought it to the prophet Elijah. She knew that, after that, she would have neither meal nor oil left, and so she and her son would just die. But her obedience and generosity toward the prophet and by the same token toward God were rewarded: Her jar of meal and jug of oil did not empty!

Then, in the gospel passage, Jesus presents another widow to us drawing attention to her in contrast to some scribes. The scribes represent important, wealthy and influential people. The widow represents the least, the poor and the weak.

Pointing to the contrast between the scribes and the widow, Jesus wants to tell us that if we want to follow Him, if we want to be his disciple, we should not behave like the scribes but rather like the widow.

In the gospel passage, the scribes act with pride: “They like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets”. But in fact their solemn appearance hides falsehood and injustice, because, as they strut about like peacocks, they act with greed: “they swallow the property of widows”. Widows along with orphans and foreigners were considered to be the most vulnerable and the least protected members of society. The scribes profit from the weakness of the widows. The scribes act also with hypocrisy because not only do they swallow the property of widows, but they do it “making at the same time a show of lengthy prayers” to hide their real intentions from the people.

Pride, greed and hypocritical prayer are not unknown territory to us today. Does it not happen sometimes that there is a gap between the appearances we project to others and what is really going on in our hearts? Does it not happen that we are ready to do anything, even on the back of our poorest and weakest brothers and sisters in humanity, in order to get what we want, to have more, forgetting that what matters is not to have, but to be... to be in relationship with God and with one another, all others? Does it not happen that we pray not to please God but for our own interests alone? Does it not happen that we pray not in the secret of our private room, but in public in order to be seen by others and to obtain their recognition?

After having presented the scribes to us, Jesus leads us in the temple where people are making monetary offerings. There are many rich people putting large sums of money into the treasury. And there is also a poor widow who contributes just two small coins. Jesus observes the woman carefully and calls the disciples' attention to the sharp contrast to be witnessed in the scene. The wealthy contributed with great ostentation what for them was superfluous while the widow put “everything she possessed, all she had to live on”.

The poor widow could have given only one coin and kept the other for herself. But she did not want to give just half to God. She gave everything to God. In her poverty, she had understood that 'in having God' (so to speak...) she had everything.

With the example of the poor widow, Jesus tells us that what is important is not the quantity of money we have in our purse, but the quality of our heart. We can have a lot of money and an empty heart. We can have plenty of money but be really poor and empty inside. We can throw a coin to a beggar without looking at that person or without speaking to them. This is not good. What is important is the relationship we establish with this beggar, recognizing that he or she is a human being who needs our attention as a human person and the recognition of brothers and sisters in humanity. When we give a coin to a beggar, it is to Christ that we give it. We wouldn't give something to Christ without looking at Him! Would we?

Pope Francis tells a true story about something which happened when he was ministering in Argentina and which can help us to understand the heart of the widow of the gospel.

"A mother and her three children were at table, the father was at work. They were eating Milan-style cutlets.... There was a knock at the door and one of the children -they were young, 5, 6 and the oldest was 7 comes and says: "Mom, there is a beggar asking for something to eat". And the mom, a good Christian, asks them: "What shall we do?" "Let's give him something, mom..." "Ok". She takes her fork and knife and cuts the cutlets in half. "Ah no, mom, no! Not like this" "Take something from the fridge". No, let's make three sandwiches with this!" The children learned that true charity is given, not with what is left over, but with what we need. That afternoon I am sure that the children were a bit hungry... But this is how it's done".

Yes, the example of this family is a good illustration of the mindset of the widow of the gospel. When we deal with the needs of our neighbours, we are called to deprive ourselves of essential things, not only what is superfluous to our needs. We are called to give people all the goods and time they need, not only the bare minimum.

If we want to follow Christ, we have to follow him wholeheartedly and not half-heartedly. We must follow Him all the time and not only when we are in the mood for it. Those who truly love don't count the cost.

May the example of the widows we met in both readings today be our inspiration as we try to follow Christ!