

# Thirty-Second Sunday of the Year

(Cycle B)

**READING I:** 1 Kings 17:10-16

**DATE:** 11/07-08/2009

**READING II:** Hebrews 9:24-28

**PLACE:** Corpus Christi

**GOSPEL:** Mark 12:38-44\*

**TIME:** 4:00 p.m.; 10:30 a.m.

**EVENT:** mass

**THEME:** Dignity comes to us whenever we act with sincerity.

## I. Give Until It Hurts

- I suspect that many pastors have chosen this weekend to make their annual fundraising appeal.
- The story of the widow's mite is a perfect set-up.
- Holding out the poor widow's sacrifice as a model for all faithful Catholics, pastors can not only make their parishioners feel guilty about not giving enough, they can make them feel guilty for giving out of their surplus instead of their need.
- My guess is that many a pastor throughout the Catholic world today is exhorting his parishioners not only to give, but to give until it hurts.
- Now, aren't you glad that I'm not like most pastors?

## II. The Widow as Victim

- Many contemporary commentators believe that using the widow as an example for church fundraising is, at best, a misinterpretation of the story and, at worst, an outright abuse of it.
- They'll point out that you cannot understand the story of the widow's mite without connecting it to the passage that immediately precedes it.
- In that passage, Jesus says, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation."
- By coupling it with Jesus' accusation that the scribes "devour the houses of widows," the widow's mite becomes an illustration of how the scribes exploit the plight of poor widows.
- Jesus is not *praising* the widow for her action, as we are traditionally told.
- Jesus is *lamenting* the fact that the woman has given everything she has to support a group of corrupt religious officials.

- While I would agree that we cannot understand the story of the widow's mite without linking it to Jesus' critique of certain scribes, I'm not so sure that I'd go as far as interpreting Jesus' remarks as *only* a lament.
- Because such an interpretation reduces the widow to a mere victim and diminishes her action to an unsuspected blunder.
- Such an interpretation sees no value in who she is or what she has done.

### **III. The Value of the Widow and Her Action**

- And that interpretation ignores Jesus' very own remarks.
- By telling his disciples that the widow put in more than all of the other contributors, he is clearly placing *some* value on her action.
- And by placing her action against the backdrop of his critique of the scribes, Jesus is also holding out her virtue as a contributor over their vice as frauds.
- He may indeed lament the fact that the widow has been put in a position where she gives all that she has to live, but he also dignifies her action by seeing value in it.
- The value of her generosity over others' greed.
- The value of her sincerity over others' hypocrisy.

### **IV. The Value of Our Sincerity**

- And I think that's a lesson from the story that we can all live with.
- Most of us, at some point, have felt that we've been taken advantage of by others; I know that it happens in ministry all the time.
- We offer financial help to someone only to discover that they're spending the money on drugs.
- We make an exception for someone on the promise that they'll start practicing their faith, and, once they get what they want, we never see them again.
- And when we are burned by others' greed and manipulation, we feel angry or disillusioned, or even foolish or ashamed.
- We become jaded and suspicious, sometimes withholding our generosity or kindness, determined not allow others to take advantage of us.
- But we can rarely control what others do.

- We can only control what we do.
- And we should not allow others' potential responses to us keep us from doing what we believe is right and just.
- And so the story of the widow's mite reminds us that, whenever we are sincere about what we do, there is value in our sincerity.
  - It's good to be kind and generous.
  - It's even better to be sincere.
- Because, like Jesus, God recognizes our sincerity.
  - And that's what gives our kindness and generosity value.
  - And like the widow in today's gospel, that's what gives us dignity.

## **V. Conclusion**

- To be honest, we scheduled our own Offertory Appeal around the parish calendar, without reference to the Sunday readings.
  - But had we considered those readings, today might not have been the best choice.
  - It might have created an interpretation of the gospel that Mark never intended.
- If the widow in today's Gospel is to be held out as an example, she's not an example of how we should be giving out of our basic needs.
  - That's wrong, and it's manipulative.
- Instead, she's an example of how we are to act with dignity and sincerity.
  - Because dignity comes to us whenever we act with sincerity, regardless of how others might respond to our good intentions.
- And that's a message worth hearing at any time.