

Homily for 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Two stories...two stories that are meant to prick our conscience and haunt our actions.

The first is about the scribes and Pharisees. They are often a thorn in the side of Christ. They are disturbed by Christ because Christ can see right through them.

As Jesus sits in the temple, He sees them all coming in. These scribes and Pharisees stream in with callous disdain for the “little people” who struggle to find a place in the temple. These scribes and Pharisees were smart operators. The historian, Josephus, mentions that they would often take advantage of older women who were widows. Without a husband or father to protect them, they would convince many of these vulnerable women to support them. And when one widow’s finances ran out, they would move on to the next.

The second story is that of the widow...actually two widows...one from the Hebrew Scriptures; the other, from the New Testament. In both cases these widows lived in abject poverty. What is striking is not what they give...a small loaf of bread, a few pennies. What is striking is that they give so generously of the little they have. Both women let go of the only things they have to keep them alive. And so the

gift they gave was a true gift from their hearts. Here you have the story of two women whose hearts were so loving they never counted the cost of what they gave. And because it was so little, Scribes and Pharisees would pay little notice to them....but Christ noticed.

In Hebrew the word for “widow” is “almanah.” The word is derived from the word “alem” which means “unable to speak.” Without a husband to speak for her or secure her rights, the widow was “the silent one.” Isn’t it striking that these two widows, these two “silent ones,” speak the loudest to us today. They instruct us on the capacity of the human heart to rise above the sometimes unfairness of life and learn instead to become more compassionate and generous in all aspects of life.

In my life as a priest I have encountered many generous people who have learned well the lesson of these two widows whom we reflect on today. One of those was a woman in our parish who buried her husband and both her children. She had every reason to become hard of heart and bitter at life. Instead, she was so generous with her time and resources and so compassionate in spirit that her life serves as an example of how we should live our own life. With her sister always at her side, she never tired of generously giving countless hours of charity and reaching out to those in need. She put me to shame. She puts all of us to shame. Her

generosity makes the example of these two widows come alive in our own parish.

My prayer is that her example and those of the generous widows in today's readings may tug at our hearts and teach us to live as Christ did...not wrapped-up in self-concern but rooted in compassion and generosity for others.