

Pastoral Message: November 7, 2021

Today's reading from Elijah tells the story of how this prophet, in a time in Israel when there was a drought and a great famine, goes to the widow of Zerephath and this woman, in great generosity, shares her last meal with Elijah. I recently read in an article the point that psychoanalyst, Ken Eisold, made that people are often more compassionate to those they can identify with. This may describe why the poor can be more generous, because they are compassionate and sympathetic because they can identify with the struggle. This woman takes a great risk of faith in the prophet's words "the jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth." This reminds us that, though the resources are there, how generously do we share them so that there is enough for everybody.

Today's gospel is the story of the widow who shares her last two coins at the temple. This was probably my favorite childhood gospel, perhaps because I could identify with what was small and in my piggy bank and to offer it all seemed a big deal. This is the point of the gospel of Jesus, and the call of discipleship is to recognize God and the smallness and the littleness where great service happens every day. Jesus is challenging pompous, showy, external religious practice, and inviting his disciples to dive deeper, like this widow who gave it all out of love.

These two widows remind me of a woman that I had the privilege to know in a former parish where I worked. Her name was Tecla. She was a single mother and an elder of the community. She ran a little bar by her house and raised her children. She was able to provide for them and even send them to get a college education. In her later years, she can still be found making pizzelle cookies, giving gifts to children, and reaching out to neighbors. She has put together a life of prayer and service. She can be found often in the empty church up the road praying, but then she puts that prayer into action. She is feisty like I imagine these widows in today's gospel to be. I remember once she told me she was upstairs where it was storming and she prayed, "God, I am tired and need you to stop this storm," and it stopped. If you ask Tecla to pray for you, you can bet she will. There is a story of Tecla that when in the local community the young men were sent off to Vietnam that Tecla had her daughters help her and every one of them were sent a care package. Tecla has little time for external show and pompousness, and, when she sees it, like the widow in today's gospel, she calls it out. To her, faith is sincere, and love needs to be real. Perhaps this weekend's readings call us to pay attention to the Tecla's and those of our church who are our true leaders and pillars.

I shared in last week's homily how easily communication can be misunderstood. Facts are important, and I need to correct myself on when I was reflecting upon War Memorial park that Leonard Harris worked to help integrate. At one time the entire park was segregated. There are no graves there, but rather a memorial with names for soldiers. I hope to visit this park with Leonard soon so that I can have a better understanding of this living history.