

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 8th 2015

The jar of flour did not go empty,
nor the jug of oil run dry. 1 Kings 17

The LORD keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets captives free. Psalm 146

Beware of the scribes ...

Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more
than all the other contributors to the treasury.
For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth,
but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had,
her whole livelihood. Mark 12

When I pray about these two women - both widows, both poor - and when I experience their generosity and their trust in God, I am deeply humbled. They also stir in me a desire to be more like them. The temptation to be like the wise and clever scribes - who strive for a righteousness which doesn't include compassion or care for those in need - is ever present, but ultimately, isn't really attractive. "They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers." [Mark 12:40]

Something simplified these women. Something brought them to a place in their poverty that carved out a capacity for God there. Sometimes, my heart can get so full that there is so little capacity for God there. If I actually stop and do an "inventory" of my heart, I discover all kinds of desires there, all kinds of attractions, a wide variety of hostilities and judgments and a list of worries, tensions and fears. Even though I might turn to God in prayer to give me what I want and relieve me of what I don't want, I can't always say my heart is full of the Lord, when I am so pre-occupied. It takes real, honest reflection to discover the many ways our possessions possess us. Our needs and our anxieties simply erode our capacity for trust.

Real poverty, even though it is dehumanizing on so many levels, can allow a person to see clearly and to know his or her need for God. Spiritual poverty, which involves a deepening freedom before what we have, or what has come to be our identity, takes us to a place of trust. Poverty, which is spiritual, helps us to know what we really need. It is the difference between asking, "Help me to have more!" and asking, "Help me to trust in you when I find myself having less."

In that place of dependence upon God, the jar doesn't go empty and the jug never runs dry. Then, instead of asking God to take away my troubles, to punish my enemies, I'm asking God to help me to be a healer, to help me be generous because I'm noticing those who are in greater need than I am.

It is sometimes said that it is common for us who have plenty, to give from our surplus. It is also said that those of us who are poor often give, even from what we need.

With these readings today, we could each ask for the grace to be able to give more - from deeper inside of us. We can ask, who needs this kind of generosity from me. Who in my family needs what I had previously felt is more than I could give? Who in the world needs my charity, beyond what I have left over after I take care of my needs first?

How can we imagine being this generous, this free? We can only get closer to that place by asking for these graces boldly, by letting God love us into freedom, by letting our Lord convince us that our real happiness will be in letting go of more and more, and falling into the hands of a loving God - who keeps faith forever and who sets captives free. [Psalm 146]

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