**Readings for November 10, 2024 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

How Do I Give?

*Jesus shows the difference between giving (of ourselves, or our money) with love and faith, and trying to do good works for the honor and recognition they bring.*

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**Opening prayer:** Thank you, Jesus, for always showing us what’s most important to you – humility, trust, love and faithfulness. Help us to notice others, as you did, and to pay attention to those in need. Amen.

Reading I [**1 Kgs 17:10-16**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1kings/17?10)

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city,
a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her,
"Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." She left to get it, and he called out after her,
"Please bring along a bit of bread." She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives,
I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug.
Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks,
to go in and prepare something for myself and my son;
when we have eaten it, we shall die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid.
Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me.
Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son.
For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, '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.'" She left and did as Elijah had said.
She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well;
the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

Responsorial Psalm [**Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/146?7)

**R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!**The LORD keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed,
    gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free.
**R. Praise the Lord, my soul!**The LORD gives sight to the blind.
    The LORD raises up those who were bowed down;
the LORD loves the just. The LORD protects strangers.
**R. Praise the Lord, my soul!**The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
    but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The LORD shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.
**R. Praise the Lord, my soul!**

Reading II [**Heb 9:24-28**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/hebrews/9?24)

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands,
a copy of the true one, but heaven itself,
that he might now appear before God on our behalf. Not that he might offer himself repeatedly,
as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own;
if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world.
But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice.
Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment, so also Christ,
offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin
but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

Gospel **Mk 12:38-44**

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds,
"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." He sat down opposite the treasury
and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.
A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.
Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them,
"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."

Related Reflections

The time lag between the two widows in this Sunday’s readings was considerable. Lots of things change in 800 years. But one thing their two societies had in common–they offered neither social security, welfare, 401K’s, nor pension plans. With no husband to provide for them, both widows were literally at the mercy of those around them, totally dependent on the generosity of others.

When you put that together with severe famine, the picture that emerges is rather bleak indeed. So when Elijah meets up with the widow of Zarephath, she confides that she is about to prepare what she expects to be the last meal for herself and her son.

Yet this does not deter Elijah. He boldly asks that she bring food to him first, even before she takes care of her son. This fits neither our normal idea of generosity nor hospitality. But the widow of Zarephath does give what’s left over. Like the widow in the gospel who puts the famous “mite” into the temple treasury, she gives not out of her surplus, but out of her want. She gives first and asks questions about her own needs later.

It takes not only generosity to do this, but also faith. Perhaps that’s part of the message. These widows knew that God was inviting them to depend upon him for their sustenance, not upon themselves. Therefore, there was no reason to be grasping about what lay in their hands today–since God would provide more daily bread tomorrow. Remember the manna that fell in the desert? The people were forbidden to gather up more than one day’s worth, except the day before the Sabbath, and then only because all work, even gathering manna, was forbidden on the Sabbath day.

We don’t know how the gospel widow fared in the days after she gave her mite to God. But we do know that by special divine intervention, the little bit of oil and flour of the widow of Zarephath lasted day after day until the famine ended in the land. She who had been willing to give a cup of cold water to a prophet certainly received a prophet’s reward.

There is something else the two widows have in common. Often, when people give large sums of money, they are anxious that others notice. The desire to impress men outweighs the desire to delight God. With the scribes of Jesus’ day, it was all about “keeping up appearances.”  Fine robes, front seats, and pious public prayers all served to make the case that these were indeed worthy, religious men. The gospel does not clearly say this, but it could be imagined that if they happened to put big bucks in the temple treasury, they’d make sure everyone knew about it.

The gifts of the two widows, on the other hand, were hidden from the view of others. We’d never know about the widow of Zarephath’s kindness and courage were it not for the inspired writer including this story in the first book of Kings. Neither would anyone have noticed the widow dropping a single coin in the basket had Jesus not drawn the apostles’ attention to the incident and commented on its significance. Indeed, we should be reminded that while little about our lives makes the evening news, God sees everything, even the smallest acts of generosity and faith.

The stories of the two widows were recorded, of course, not for their sake. The stories are told again and again *for us*. They serve as a reminder that ultimately it is not about how much we give, but with how much faith and love we give it.

  *Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D. (published on Catholicmom.org)*

***From Pope Francis:***

The message of this Gospel passage is … an appeal to generosity. Generosity belongs to everyday life; it's something we should think: 'How can I be more generous, with the poor, the needy? … How can I help more’? ... We can do miracles through generosity. Generosity in little things. Let us ask for this grace from the Lord, this generosity which broadens our hearts and leads us to magnanimity. We need to have a magnanimous heart, where all can enter. Those wealthy people who gave money were good; that elderly lady was a saint.

[Pope Francis reminds us that generosity matters](https://thedialog.org/international-news/pope-francis-reminds-us-generosity-matters-and-excess-is-avoidable/) - Nov 26, 2018

**How do we trust?**

The widow (in the first reading) had only some puzzling words to rely on. But rely on them she did. She bakes her tiny scraps of bread, in front of the wide eyes of her son, and takes all of it, every bit of it, plus the water, to Elijah.

Does this story make sense? No. Is there an explanation? Yes. This widow knew God so well that she trusted in his goodness even in the face of impending death. Her last act would be one of trust.

And this is the real meaning of trust, to release our own control of things. When the chips are down, let go and let God. Even in your last extremity. God had sent Elijah to help the widow, not rob her. But she first had to trust. She did.

In the Gospel, a second widow illustrates the same kind of trust, putting the last two pennies she has to her name into the collection box. Jesus sees this happen and understands the depth of her faith.

I suppose the question then turns to you and me. How much trust do we place? Do we do it in fear? Alternately, how much do we trust God?

* John Foley, SJ (published on liturgy.slu.edu)

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Our recent gospel was about the blind beggar who wanted to see. I hope (and continue to hope!) that we will grow in our ability to “see” the world around us with the “eyes of Jesus”. Today, we seem to have a very powerful and concrete example of what “seeing through the eyes of Jesus” looks like!

We know from historical accounts that the Temple of Jerusalem was quite majestic. We also know from Matthew’s account of this same scene that there were crowds in the Temple on the day described in today’s gospel. So, it is safe to think that the scene in which Jesus and his apostles found themselves included a great deal of activity, noise, and PEOPLE.

Aside from giving from her want and not her surplus, what does the poor widow do that gets Jesus’ attention? Is it her manner of expensive dress? Obviously not. Both Matthew and Mark comment on the presence of the rich in the Temple that day. Would the apostles have taken their eyes off the wealthy to notice the poor widow without Jesus’ intervention?

It has struck me for a long time that Jesus was most likely the ONLY person in the Temple that day who noticed that woman. And I find it worthwhile to ask myself and ponder on the reason WHY? HOW?

For me, the answer to those questions is found in the heart of Jesus. The gospels make clear that He had a special place in his heart for the poor, the **marginalized, those without a voice, without status.** Had He not first noticed the woman, He could not possibly have noticed the total generosity of her gift to the treasury. This scene for me gives a clear ‘glimpse’ *into* the heart of Jesus. He “tips his hand”, as it were.

Does the answer also lie in the familiar adage, “It takes one to know one”? Or put another way, “kindred spirits”? In the midst of this crowd Jesus found the purity and generosity of heart that He spoke about in the Beatitudes. Perhaps because His “eyes” were already “open” and searching?

 Kirk Reynolds, S.J. - posted on Jesuit Reflections, <https://www.loyola.org/category/jesuit-reflections/>

***Note:*** One of the central themes of Catholic Social Teaching is the **Option for the Poor and vulnerable.**

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the [needs of the poor and vulnerable first](https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/economic-justice-economy/index.cfm).

See more about the principles of Catholic Social Teaching at: <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>

**Spotting Discrepancy:** Throughout the Gospel Jesus has consistently championed human needs over the hardened practices of the synagogue. Now he targets the Temple treasury. When he sits opposite the treasury, it symbolizes that he is opposed to the whole temple atmosphere around money. It is a public affair with the rich parading their large sums. But Jesus is not concerned with the rich… the rich take care of themselves.

But the widow divests herself of all support. Her generosity plays into the devouring greed of the Temple. Those who are supposed to protect her leave her, literally penniless. What is most frightening is that she cooperates with her exploitation. This is a condition that is often mentioned in the literature on oppression. The widow may not grasp all that is going on, but Jesus, the Integrated One who is sensitive to all duplicity, has not missed it. The Gospels show us a keen sense of hypocrisy.

* John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels, Year B*, Liturgical Press

Discussion Questions

Fr. Foley’s reflection focuses on trust in God. Think for a minute about your own ability to trust God completely, especially in the way these widows show us? How hard is this?

What can help to increase our trust in God? We asked this question a couple of weeks ago. How is it going? Can it help to remember the times you experienced the goodness and abundance of God? (Like the Psalm?) Can it help to see that God is still providing in the world (often through the kindness of others)?

Think of Jesus watching the woman in the middle of the bustling temple area. Notice that he sees her dignity and worth. Do I tend to notice those who seem insignificant? What steps could I take in my life that would help me to pay better attention and see “through the eyes of Jesus?”

Talk about some other Gospel accounts where Jesus purposely shows an interest and love for the poor and vulnerable. He seems to really want us to know that God values poverty, simplicity and humility. Why do you think this is so important to him?

This Gospel passage speaks of giving monetarily. In what other ways can we use our resources to alleviate the pain of others? How can we educate ourselves more about the needs around us?

According to Pope Francis, (see his reflection) how do you develop a magnanimous heart? Do you think it happens little by little or all at once? Is grace needed?

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**Closing prayer:**

Gracious God, everything we have is a gift from you. Open our hearts so that we, like the poor widow, may give to others with a spirit of generosity and humility. Give us a thirst for justice and help us to recognize our own capacity for compassion and caring. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who gave his own life out of love for us. Amen.

***Our Weekly Focus Thought (adapted from Pope Francis)***

“To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must allow ourselves to be astonished.”

*How was I astonished this week?*

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***Thoughts for the coming week:***

Our fall readings have shown us God’s abundant gifts (food for the hungry, sight to the blind, sustenance for the widow). Take a few moments to recognize some of the abundance in your life. Name a few of these particular gifts from God.

Then, think about how we feel when we are living our lives closer to God, more aligned with Jesus’ examples and teachings. What kinds of gifts come from this deeper relationship? Take a minute and ask for the grace to respond with love and generosity, like our widows in scripture.

Also, looking back on last week’s Gospel, and tying in with today’s message of trust, take some time to ask yourself: What does it mean to love God… with my whole heart? With all my soul? With all my mind? With all my strength? How am I doing with these precepts?

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Let nothing disturb you, Nothing frighten you; All things are passing; God never changes; Patient endurance attains all things; Whoever possesses God is wanting in nothing; God alone suffices**. - *St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)***