

Sunday November 7, 2021
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Parishioner Reflection

By: Mary Bastedo

“She, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had to live on.”

In today's Gospel Jesus calls our attention to a poor widow who quietly puts two small copper coins into the temple treasury. He wants his disciples to notice and appreciate what she has done. Rich people were tossing in bigger amounts of money, yet Jesus says this poor woman contributed more than they did. How can that be? The rich gave 'out of their abundance', Jesus points out. What they gave was no big deal for them, it was 'small change,' easily tossed into the basket. They wouldn't miss it. Whereas the widow gave 'out of her poverty,' putting in all she had to live on. She would certainly miss it. Where would her next meal come from? What motivated her to give so completely, even to the point of vulnerability and hardship?

Jesus always looks at what is in the heart of a person. For the rich, the gesture of throwing money into the treasury was probably not motivated by genuine compassion for the needy. It was perfunctory, a fulfillment of their religious duty, maybe even something they did to keep up a righteous image of themselves. For the widow, on the other hand, the gesture of offering her last two coins came from her heart, from her deep love and trust in God and her empathy for those even more needy than she. Jesus' attention and deep appreciation of her was a blessing for her. She is held up as a model for all of us.

The widow in the prophet Elijah's time, was also radically poor. She had only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug, which she was preparing to bake so that she and her son could eat one last morsel of bread and then die. Yet she gave everything she had in response to Elijah's need. What was in her heart? Bitterness? Anger? Resentment? Despair? None of these. When Elijah approached her, asking for her last bit of meal and oil, she listened and responded to his request, sharing all she had with him. She felt compassion for him and trust in God. "Do not be afraid," Elijah assured her. There will be enough for all of us; "the jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." Indeed her generosity was blessed. Miraculously the oil and meal did not run out until finally the drought that had lasted for years ended and the rains came.

During these last 20 months of pandemic we have experienced many forms of poverty. For some it's the poverty of isolation and confinement. For others it's a poverty of time

and energy, caught between multiple demands of home life and work. For some it's very real financial poverty and insecurity. For many it's the poverty of grief and helplessness in the face of death and loss.

How do we respond to all these forms of poverty? Do they make us afraid, fearful, resentful and angry? God's word to us is, "Do not be afraid!" These two poor widows can show us the way forward, teaching us how to give out of our poverty. They point us beyond ourselves to keep our hearts open to the needs of others and to trust that God will provide.

Throughout the pandemic the volunteers at Welcome Table, offering a weekly meal for those in need, were determined to keep going. In spite of lockdowns and restrictions in the use of the kitchen, they managed to continue to offer take-out meals to people in an outdoor parking lot. The city council and many local restaurants and catering companies responded generously. Everything was provided. The meals continued.

On Thanksgiving Sunday I delivered dinners to several local families. At one house a mother and her autistic son were sitting outside waiting for me. I've known them for many years. They always seem to be living close to the edge. Yet this mother made bracelets for the Welcome Table volunteers at our last in-person Christmas dinner. Her generosity and kindness touched me. During the pandemic she and her son walked several blocks every Wednesday evening to pick up a meal from the Welcome Table, the mother using her walker, with her son a few steps behind. I've never heard her complain.

As we hear in Psalm 146, God keeps faith forever with the poor.