

Thirty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Jesus observed that the wealthier worshipers were contributing from their surplus where the poor widow was contributing from her livelihood. The story involved how people were tithing which is material support, but you could extend this story to how people contribute spiritually. We can see worshipers in those days and today who contribute from their core being or those worshipers/parishioners who just give enough of themselves to get by or in other words, some parishioners show up to stamp their worship card by making an appearance. This story works equally well for both material and spiritual contributions. Both are important and necessary for followers of Christ to put their wallet or their heart where they will stake their lives. This story obviously made an impression on Jesus to the point that he impressed the Apostles to repeat the story to Christians for the past 2 thousand years. And I think you know which worshiper impressed Jesus by putting her wallet and her heart in complete control of God.

We actually get this story twice today because in the first reading, the poor widow gave to Elijah from her last remaining flour and oil that was to be the last meal for her and her son who were destined to die from starvation. But since she trusted in God, Elijah promised her that she would be provided for. And indeed, the last bit of flour and oil lasted her and her son for another year. We don't hear the end of the story for the widow mentioned in Mark but the point is that God is pleased when we give to Him from our poverty, not from our wealth. Because when we give from our poverty we are acknowledging our dependence on God, not on things of this world.

So, what is the difference between people who contribute from their core being or those parishioners who just give enough of themselves to get by; by showing up and stamping their worship card? I think it has to do with our attitude and how relevant we think church is. How relevant is Jesus Christ in our world today? Do we truly believe that Jesus is our savior or are we just hedging our bets in case there is something real here? Well, when doubts start creeping in we look to alternatives besides Jesus Christ so that we can evaluate different truths. In my examination of the truth professed by Jesus Christ, I find the alternatives shallow, hollow, and downright deceptive. I find Jesus' truth to be full of life, honest, and truly freeing. It is true that the truth will set you free. And when you don't have the full truth, you find that you are partly enslaved. Enslaved to a life of sin and separation from God. Search for relevancy; the widow found God relevant; you better believe that Jesus is relevant.

I was reading a book by Matthew Kelly from Australia who identified three truths that the world provides. Individualism – Hedonism – and Minimalism. I see these truths everyday in our world and they are nothing like the truth you will get from Jesus. Individualism is the idea that I am the most important consideration in any equation. If I have my needs met, then the world is fine. Is it okay that millions of babies and children do not have adequate health care? Do you want to live in a world where your neighbor is suffering because she has to decide between dinner for the older kids and heart medication for her baby? Jesus wants you to find Joy (Jesus first, then others, and your consideration is last), that is Jesus over you. I want to live in a world where everyone finds Jesus relevant, don't you?

Hedonism is the idea that happiness and pleasure is the highest good. Too many people get lost in this because seeking pleasure at any cost always has losers. Seeking pleasure becomes an addiction to gambling, drugs, sex, and other self-serving mechanisms. Jesus wants us to face reality, not run from it. These addictive behaviors just mask our unhappy situations. When we seek the will of God we find our true vocation in life and happiness is found in doing the work that we were created for. We don't need to seek artificial pleasures. I want to live in a world where everyone finds God's will relevant, don't you?

Minimalism is the idea that I should only do the things necessary to just get by. I guess you could just say laziness. You see this at work when employees are not giving their full attention to the job at hand. You see this with parents who only give their children a few hours of their time every week. You see this at church when people ask Father if the wedding Mass on Saturday afternoon meets their Sunday obligation. How is the Body of Christ supposed to operate? If both feet don't agree together to start walking, you are going down. God has given you gifts to build up the Church, we are counting on your full cooperation, not your minimal cooperation. I want to live in a world where everyone finds their God-given gifts and talents relevant, don't you?

You are the Church. The people of God make up the Church, there is nowhere else to look. So, I have to ask you, How relevant is Jesus Christ in our world today? St. Paul states it this way in our second reading. You will die, you will be judged, and Jesus will come again to bring salvation for those eagerly awaiting him. If you knew you were going to die in the next 60 minutes would Christ be more relevant? If you knew you were going to die in the next 60 years would Christ be more relevant? In the context of eternity there is no difference between 60 minutes and 60 years. Last week when Fr. John related the story of Eddie to us, it made me think about what Eddie saw and said when he had 60 minutes to live. "If you saw what I saw, you would forget everything of this world and you would come running to see the same thing." Heaven is beautiful and it awaits us all. But God wants us to have heaven now on this earth.

I know that Jesus Christ is relevant because I talked to him this morning. I started praying to God every day about 6 years ago. Now I know who my friends are because through prayer, God has directed me to contact these people. Now I know how to manage my funds because through prayer, God has shown me what to do and I don't have to worry about money. Now I know how to spend my time and my days are always filled with peace and harmony because through prayer, God has shown me good priorities. Now I know how to deal with suffering because through prayer, God has shown me how to share my suffering with Jesus Christ.

The truth of Jesus Christ is not individualism, hedonism, or minimalism. The truth of Jesus Christ is love. Pray to God that you can find His love relevant in your life because that is what he desires for you. You won't find Jesus relevant until you take the risk like the widow and give your total self. You're holding back. We are very comfortable giving from our surplus instead of our poverty. We give to St. Vincent de Paul out of our surplus in the pantry. We give to Catholic Charities out of our surplus funds. We give time for helping others out of our surplus. Whatever we do, wherever we go, remain in the name of Jesus who sent us. When you are giving yourself, check your attitude, are you giving for Jesus or yourself, because outside of His name our giving loses its divine energy.