

Generosity Beyond Measure

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (1 Kgs 17:10-16)

¹⁴For 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.”

Elijah and the widow

¹⁰He (Elijah) arose and went to Zarephath. When he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called out to her, “Please **bring me** a small cupful of water to drink.”^b ¹¹She left to get it, and he called out after her, “Please **bring along** a crust of bread.”

Widow, preparing to die

¹²She said, “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 few sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.”

Elijah’s assurance

¹³Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid. Go and do as you have said. But first **make me** a little cake and **bring it** to me. Afterwards you can prepare something for yourself and your son.

God’s (generosity) providence

¹⁴ 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.’”



Widow obeys and did not go hungry

¹⁵She left and did as Elijah had said. She had enough to eat for a long time—he and she and her household. ¹⁶The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD spoken through Elijah.

FOCUS: The Generosity of the Widow and of God

COMMENTARY

- There are two characters in the story: The prophet Elijah and the widow (no name).
- In v. 10-11, Elijah, being man of God, exhibits confidence. He freely, confidently commands the widow to do a favor for him (bring me water and bread), as if she were his slave.
- In v.12, the widow does not refuse Elijah, but states a fact that supply is running out. After the meal, they will die.
- The land is struck with famine.

- In v.13, Elijah seems to take things lightly, and demands that he should be served first. He must be prioritized.
- V.14 gives the reason why Elijah is comfortable with his orders. Elijah has received a revelation.
- In v.15, the widow obeys and believes what Elijah says.
- V.16 affirms the fulfillment of Elijah's prediction.
- The prophet Elijah is in command of the situation because he has the word of God.
- The woman innocently obeys Elijah.
- To appreciate better this passage, start at verse 1 Kgs 17:1.

REFLECTIONS

Famine is one of the motifs in the OT stories. It is a powerful setting where God makes his power felt and how people are made to change directions.

Here Elijah, also affected by famine, tries to help himself for his survival. God directs him to the widow in Zarephath.

The widow is resigned to die. She is preparing for the last meal. She does not care who is talking to her. But she obeys just the same.

In times of need, we must be open to possibilities, we must move on because God is generous.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

(Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10)

PRAISE THE LORD, MY SOUL!

SECOND READING (Heb 9:24-28)

²⁴For 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. ²⁵**Not** that he might offer himself **repeatedly**, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; ²⁶if 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. ²⁷Just as it is appointed that human beings die **once**, and after this the judgment, ²⁸so 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.

FOCUS: Non-repetitious character of Christ's action as High Priest

COMMENTARY

- The Reading reflects on the mystery of Christ as a high priest. This high priest is now in heaven, not in the Temple of Jerusalem.
- V. 24 specifies the sanctuary as “not made by human hands,” different from the OT temple.
- V. 24 states the purpose of Christ's entrance: to appear before on our behalf (mediator, intercessor).
- V. 25 states what Christ does not do in heaven: to offer repeatedly, in contrast to OT high priest (annually he goes to the Holy of Holies [v.26a]).
- V. 26b is emphatic on “once for all” thing. In one click Christ saved the world.
- V. 27 makes clear his point on “once for all” by using the reality of death on our part as human beings. We die once.
- V. 28 continues to develop the point and adds something new: the **second time** appearance, to bring salvation, not to die again.

REFLECTIONS

Christ's acts as high priest are effective and efficacious.

Christ's high priesthood cannot be reduplicated. It is only proper to Christ. This makes him unique as a high priest.

Now some people ask: Why then do priests keep repeating the mass? What's the use when we are saved once and for all? (Make a research)

GOSPEL READING (Mk 12:38-44)

The victimizing scribes (not generous)

^{38*} ^pIn the course of his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation."

The generous widow

^{41*} ^qHe sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. ⁴³Calling 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. ⁴⁴For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has **contributed all** she had, her whole livelihood."

FOCUS: Generosity

COMMENTARY

- Vv. 38-40 talk about the unbecoming behavior of scribes: wear long robes; accept greetings in the marketplaces; have seats of honor, and devour houses of widows.

- The last line indicates their punishment: severe condemnation (v. 40b).
- Vv. 41-44 contrast the rich and the poor widow
- Rich give large sums; the widow, two small coins, *Latin quadrans* (v. 41b and v. 42).
- For Jesus, the widow gives more (all that she needs to survive); she exceeds all in generosity.

REFLECTION

The Gospel Reading is a call to generosity.

There is no excuse for being un-generous, for even a poor widow can be generous.

Christians should not behave like the scribes mentioned in the Gospel: they devour, they act for their selfish interest, they seek recognition. They do these things at the expense of the poor.

God knows how generous we are. He knows where we are coming from (from our bounty or from our poverty).

There is heroism in generosity. In generosity, you deprive yourself of something you need and give it to others. It is other centered. It is not thinking of one's own benefit.

We do not give in exchange for something. Generosity has nothing to do with it.

We should avoid giving gifts in order to be reciprocated later on.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading talks about the loving care of God (generosity) in the life of endangered Elijah and the widow.

The Second Reading reflects on the non-repetitious acts of Christ as high priest (suffering, death = salvation). These are supreme acts

of generosity, total giving of oneself.

The Gospel Reading warns the people of the scribes and Pharisees who victimize them; in contrast, he commends on the widow who is so generous to a fault. She is more generous than the rich.

How to develop your homily/sharing

Begin by relating an experience of generosity (when you needed money, help, and someone came to your rescue.)

Discuss the meaning of generosity according to the Readings:

The First Reading talks about God directing Elijah to go to the widow for his survival. Incidentally, the widow through her generosity and her son survive. Their supply does not run out. God shows the way to survive in times of needs and difficulties. God is generous. We can obtain God's help if we listen to him, if we do what he commands.

The Second Reading talks about Christ's powerful act to save us. He effects salvation once and for all. Jesus is efficient in showing his generosity to us. He enters heaven to intercede for us. He is generous with his time.

The Gospel Reading abhors the unkind acts of the scribes (they devour). They take advantage of the poor. They seek honor (self-seeking, self-aggrandizing). The Gospel Reading highly approves the generosity of the widow. By giving out of her poverty, she shows that it is still possible to practice generosity. God measures not quantitatively, but qualitatively. The generosity of the poor surpasses that of the rich. Giving out of excess is ok, but it is more ok to give out your need.

In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us how to be generous. Here generosity means spending your money and energy which you personally need for others' needs. Something is subtracted from you.

Generosity is dying to your needs, not responding to your immediate needs, for a cause, for others. The widow did not give to her fellow poor, but to the collection box (for the maintenance of the Temple or for charitable purposes). She does not expect to be reciprocated in that collection box.

God notices all gestures of generosity. He lets little acts of generosity go unnoticed.

Nobody goes hungry when everybody is generous.

When people focus their minds on how to multiply and keep their money, many go hungry. Generosity is dead. We are dead.

Those who love money keep wages low; workers become their property.

They do not regularize their workers (*contractual only*). They withhold their wages. They lend their money with high interest rates. They do not donate to the church charities.

They give only to those who can give back. They capitalize on the capital. Nothing matters but the capital.

We must be reminded that Christians are first of all, disciples (imitators) of Christ who is generous, who never used people to enrich Himself, who gave Himself to heal us. Christians are listeners to his teachings (to be generous). Secondary is being a businessman.

The eucharist is a reminder of God's generosity to us. Jesus gives himself generously to us. He feeds us with his body and blood in the form of bread and wine. He strengthens us with his presence and promise of eternal life, to all of us who try to live generous lives.

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III. OUR CONTEXT

How successful (or failure) is *Pondong Pinoy* in your parish? (HM)