

From the Pastor's Desk

Give and it shall be given unto you.

Archeologists tell us that the Christians of the early years of the Church regularly met for worship in members' homes. Sometimes these were the homes of widows. Some might have been the wives of Christian martyrs or men who "disappeared" under ruthless leaders of the empire. Most, simply outlived their husbands, since it was common practice that young girls were given in marriage to older men. So, more often than not, the men died first. We hear of two such women in today's scriptures.

In the patriarchal societies of Jesus and Elijah in which these two women lived, wives stayed home to tend to home and family. Thus, it was often a difficult life for a widow. If a woman's husband died, she was left without any real means of support; she lost her source of income and sometimes even her house. We see in the Old Testament and the Gospels that widows were associated with extreme poverty and lived a marginal existence. The two widows from *First Kings* and the *Gospel of Mark* fit that description, so poor that even their names aren't mentioned despite being central figures in each story.

These two widows are models of sacrificial giving. The widow in the first reading fully expects to die of starvation along with her son. Some suggest that the sticks she was gathering were hemlock branches, which would poison them when eaten! The entire land was in the midst of a severe drought, making food even more difficult to come by, especially for a woman of no means. Yet she was willing to give the last little bit she had to a foreign traveler in need, who didn't share her nationality, culture or religion.

Jesus proclaims that the widow in the Gospel "*has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.*" She gave her last two coins as an offering to God. Perhaps she believes, like Elijah, **that God will provide**. She proves to be a woman of faith and sacrifice.

One author, in an aid from the Missalette company, puts it like this: *Each reading today tells of someone who sacrificed the very last thing they could offer. The widow who welcomes Elijah sacrifices her last grains of flour and last drops of oil to bake bread for this stranger. The widow Jesus sees outside the temple sacrifices two small coins, her whole livelihood, to the temple treasury. The author of Hebrews points out that Jesus sacrificed his very life for our sins.*

Jesus assumed for himself the title "Son of Man." The Son of Man was that one fully human person who reached the fullest potential for which he/she was created. He is the embodiment of the two-fold commandment we heard last Sunday — love of God and love of neighbor.

As the perfect human person, Jesus is fully aware of human weakness and failing, and he "called out" the hypocrisy to the religious leaders. Though they could faithfully recite the *Shema*: Hear, O Israel; "*The Lord our God is one*" (Deuteronomy 6:4) and love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), these teachings haven't taken root in their hearts as it did in Jesus. They can, by their words and rules, motivate a widow to give all she has, but not lift a finger to help her. The widow is a symbol of the most vulnerable in Israel. She is desperate. Could her giving be a prayer to God to save her? After all, God made justice to widows a condition of his covenant with the Chosen People. Jesus praises her generosity and faith.

How conscious are we of the sacrifices others have made for us? Such sacrifices that strengthened us in our needs and comforted us in our sorrows. How conscious are we of the Son of God who sacrificed his divinity to share in our humanity? How intentional are our own sacrifices for others; family, friends, strangers, Church?

We can not out give God.

Fr. Bob

CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
WORKING ON THE MARGINS

Next week, our second collection will be for the **CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**. Over 43 million people in the United States live in poverty. This collection supports programs to empower people to identify and

address the obstacles they face as they work to bring permanent and positive change to their communities. Learn more about the Catholic Campaign for Human Development at www.usccb.org/cchd/collection.