

Readings for November 7, 2021 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

## *How Do I Give?*

*Jesus shows us 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.

**Meditation suggestion:** These readings show us examples of God's abundant gifts to us (food for the hungry, sight to the blind, abundance 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 what happens and 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.

Reading I **1 Kgs 17:10-16**

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**

**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**

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. Prevailing wisdom says to feed the guest after we've fed our kids. Pay the bills first, then give to the poor a portion of your bonus check or tax refund.

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. They have received their reward and no earthly notoriety could possibly do them any good now. No, 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)*

## *Focus on Justice*

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, which is the central theme of the passage and what Jesus calls attention to, 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 very 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/>

### **Jesus values and pays attention to those who are poor:**

One of the 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.

"The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition." This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. . .

"Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation." ([Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), nos. 2444, 2448, quoting Centesimus annus, no. 57, and Libertatis conscientia, no. 68)

Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. (St. John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Year [Centesimus Annus]*, no. 58)

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>

## *Discussion Questions*

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 you know of that show Jesus purposely showing an interest and love for the poor and vulnerable. Why do you think this is so important to him?

What about accounts that show Jesus feeding and nurturing the people?

Is it easy, or a challenge, to recognize our complete dependence on God, and to trust that God gives us what we need?

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**Closing prayer:** Lord Jesus, what you ask is often beyond my power.  
Loving those who hate me,  
Showing mercy and compassion to those who may not even realize my sacrifice;  
that’s a new way of living for me.  
Stir your Holy Spirit within me;  
Let me see as you see, and love as you love, without counting the cost. Amen.

*Allan Fr. Wright, 25 Life-Changing Questions from the Gospels, Ave Maria Press, 2016*

### ***One other related prayer:***

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)**