

## The Thirty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

*This is the 2nd in a series of homilies on a vision for Faith Formation.*

Though unnamed and unknown, the simple acts of widows in today's Scripture are remembered down through the ages because their examples speak so clearly in their intent. An act of hospitality, a meagre meal, a small coin generously offered that was equivalent to an entire life.

Last week I began a conversation about being formed as a Catholic Christian; a life-long process that begins as a child surrounded by family and parish, and continuing throughout our lives.

From my letter and last week's homily, do you recall my memories of Saint Anne teaching the Virgin Mary, Kristen singing her heart out at the Eucharist, my parents teaching me fishing and finances, Saint Joseph woodworking with Jesus at his side, and you, teaching your child to ride a bike, drive a car, or make the Sign of the Cross?

Like the widows these acts of trust and faith in God seem meagre and small to the world; to God they are a valuable part of our entire life.

It is such experiences that we *do* remember. Why? Because it is experiences, not knowledge, that changes our lives and offers us insight and new pathways. I believe that many people today are looking for a commitment to something greater than themselves; something that is transcendent. Because of the failures, divisions and stagnation of governments and religious institutions, and the intrusion of corporations and social media platforms many people are searching in all the wrong places and hearing voices that are hollow. Life is not being fulfilled but found wanting.

Yet the *right* place is in our midst, in our homes. The voice of Jesus spoken in our hearts does *not* ring hollow. I've said from the beginning that this pandemic is an opportunity being used by the Spirit of God.

One of the opportunities of the last 20 months has been for us to discover anew that we can access our unlimited, loving, and forgiving God anywhere, at any time, no matter where we find

ourselves in life. Our living spaces have doubled as sacred places as we faced our grief, isolation and loneliness, missing what is so essentially human, gathering together.

The home therefore is the beginning and foundation of the Church. It is where we first gather around a table for a meal, first learn to interact with others, first learn to pray, first learn to ask for forgiveness and say, “*thank you*”.

Do you see in these home examples – in miniature – the Sunday gathering of our community? ...hospitality in greeting and inquiring about each other? ...the asking of forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and penitential acts, and the Eucharistic Prayer with which we say, “*thank you*” to the Eternal and Divine Trinity?

We have been given an opportunity to reconsider how we carry out faith formation and move from a classroom model back to the incubator of the church, the home and family life. This takes seriously the promises made by parents at the Baptism of their children to be the *first and best teachers in the ways of faith by what they say and do*. A responsibility to be supported by the parish community. This realization, along with understanding the complexities of contemporary family life, led us to what we call ***Bite Size Catholic Living***.

***Bite Size***. It is healthier to eat several small portions throughout a day than a few big meals. Our Catholic Christian tradition of prayer, liturgy, moral and social justice teachings, law, theology and philosophy, art and music, and spiritual writings, is rich and nuanced. No one person can encounter it all, but a little at a time can deeply nourish us.

***Catholic Living***. It is about following Jesus and the pattern of life that he lived. It is making our Catholic Christian Faith part of life every day, building on the family’s daily routines and experiences crowned by the Sunday Eucharist.

***Bite Size Catholic Living*** consists of a monthly mailing which is also posted on our website. To assist parents, each week a brief supplemental email is sent supporting the mailing, highlighting a saint’s feast that week, or linking to a brief video touching on the topic covered in that month’s installment.

Each mailing highlights an aspect of the Christian Faith in three sections: Lifestyle, Prayer and Belief.

For example, in the first installment it is suggested every time a family goes to the supermarket [you are going there already], you purchase a few extra cans of vegetables or boxes of pasta. Mom and dad remind their children that Jesus taught us to feed the hungry and there are hungry people and children in our area; then, together, you drop off the purchases in church for the Food Pantry. Lifestyle: Christians feed the hungry.

Two forms of a 'grace before meals' are offered for the family to use before nightly dinners. Prayer: Give thanks for the food provided for us through the grace of God.

Two passages of Scripture are offered for the family to read and pray about together, along with a reflection question to discuss. Belief: Jesus teaches us to feed the hungry.

Thus, to be a Catholic Christian is primarily a **life style** rooted in **prayer** that expresses our **beliefs**. These three traits of a Christian's life are bound together as one.

What do our children experience?

They experience their parents introducing them to Jesus, not only in reading his teachings, but through living them out in the act of feeding the hungry through the purchase and delivery of food. How often is it recorded that Jesus fed the hungry? Does not Jesus continue to feed people through food pantries, Catholic Charities and every time we gather for Eucharist?

Children experience mom and dad as leaders of prayer at meals, teaching the family to pray and be thankful by their example. Leading prayer is not just for the clergy and religious but an act of every mature Christian. And isn't that the foundation of the Universal Prayers and Eucharistic Prayer?

Daughters and sons experience community as together the family listens to God's Word and reflects on its meaning in their lives. Isn't that the Liturgy of the Word and homily?

And it all happens, like the widows, in small acts that constitute a fully committed life.

These mailings are not chapters of a manual or homework that is done so you can "take a test" and check it off your 'to do' list. Each mailing contains an aspect of the Christian life to be encountered over and over again. Every time you go to the supermarket. Every time you sit down to a meal. Every Epiphany to bless your home. Every time you say "I'm sorry". Every time you visit a cemetery.

Is this an uneasy transition? Sure it is. For so long, we have used a classroom model and handed our children over to 'experts' to do the spiritual work of faith formation; to transition from classroom to home, from catechist to parents, guardians and larger parish community, from primarily doctrine to lifestyle will take time to reflect on and see its fruits.

I expect it is daunting for parents who think that because they are not theologically trained as catechists, vowed religious or clergy they are not up to the task for forming their children as disciples of Christ. But consider, wasn't saying "thank you" one of the first things our parents taught us? "Thank you" is at the heart of all prayer. And the highest form of prayer and "thank you" is the Sunday Eucharist.

All that parents, and those who support them, need to do is 'connect the dots'. Connect that "thank you" to grandma for a birthday gift to the "thank you" to God for all good gifts when gathering for the Eucharist on Sunday. Make connections from preparing a meal for the family to providing food for the hungry. Connect our own shopping for winter clothing with the poor who also need something warm to wear.

I've offered you examples from our tradition and my own life of what it means to be formed into Jesus Christ. What are the spiritual lessons you live out from your parents? That is ***Bite Size Catholic Living***.

Check out the top menu of our website. Remember the example of the widows. Reflect on the example of your parents. Discover your 'domestic church'. Live the life of a Christian, ***Bite Size!***