

Ordinary Time 32

Are we giving God out of the overflow, the surplus, or the substance of our lives? Of our treasure and time and talent?

Jesus spoke a great deal about our attitude toward possessions, including our abilities and our time.

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.”

“You cannot serve God and mammon (material things).”

Jesus to a certain degree praises our carefulness about money while pointing out how much more careful we should be with things that are eternal.

Remember the story of rich man who was worried about how to store all of his abundance and keep it all for himself, never guessing that his own death was immanent?

Do we acknowledge that God is the source of everything – including that which we earned through our labor? That behind it all, we were blessed - blessed to live in a free country with enormous natural and human resources, blessed to have our health, blessed to have the intelligence and abilities that enabled us to perform well, blessed to have the opportunities and the support we received from others?

Are we “tipping” God or are we acknowledging that everything we have is actually His anyway, and we are just using it for now. Is He our servant or are we His servants? Our attitude about our possession reveals the truth about how we relate to God.

The widow of Zarephath was from a pagan territory and not a daughter of Israel. Hence she refers to “The Lord, your God”, that is, Elijah’s God. But the God of the prophet Elijah becomes her God, too, as she entrusts her future to God: she how the widow ended up entrusting a part of the little she had to God’s servant, relying on God’s provision for her and her son’s survival during the drought.

Today’s Gospel begins with Jesus describing the scribes, the teachers of the religious law, who have just been challenging Him. Jesus points out to His own disciples that they saw in their ministry an opportunity not for service as higher status. The scribes were known to use their positions for financial gain – for instance taking advantage of vulnerable widows and gain a portion of their inheritance, ostensibly in return for

offering prayers. The attitude concerning money – and status – is one of greediness, stinginess, a desire to maximize to the fullest my sense of being in control.

Shortly thereafter, as they walk in the Temple precincts near the offering box, a poor widow comes with the little that she has and gives it to God, holding back nothing. This is in contrast to the scribes – and those who gave out of their surplus – what they did not need.

Jesus uses this as a “teachable moment”. Our gifts to God must be seen not in the absolute size but in proportion to the person’s circumstances. This woman is a spiritual “giant” in that she trusts God to provide her daily bread tomorrow and holds nothing back. This is the kind of faith we all need to be developing: ready to offer everything to God, for someday that will be what we must do. God alone knows our circumstances and the context of our offering. One person’s small gift to God is proportionally larger than a much larger amount from someone who has great abundance. The good deeds we do as disciples are not evaluated one standard but are measured according to the circumstances of our lives and the faith they require.

By offering to God now, we actually prepare for the eventual gift of surrendering all. It comes back to the basic question: what or who do we serve? How do we show that in our actions? In our giving, our generosity toward others, our worry versus trust about the future?

That is the point of the reading from Hebrews in which we hear how Jesus entered the true Temple sanctuary, that is, heaven. Each year, the Temple priests would enter the Holy of Holies behind the curtain taking the blood of the animal sacrifice to make expiation for sin. Jesus took His own blood into the true Holy of Holies to atone for our sins that we might be declared justified before the Father and be set free to live holy lives, forgiven and free, to dedicate our lives to serving God. Our giving is a way to grow that faith and holiness.

Jesus offered all for us. As His disciples, let us offer our substance to God through heroic service and offering not from our surplus but to an extent that requires faith.