

Bible Study

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle B

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord God, in you we live and move and are who we are. Be with us now in our prayer and our reflection. We ask you to open our hearts today and show us Jesus, in whom we rejoice for the salvation that he won for us. May he who is the Glory of the Father, the King of heaven and earth, reign in us forever. We lift our prayer to you, the Blessed Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Questions before the readings

1. How did God take care of you this week?
2. Was there a time this week when you felt helpless or, at least, vulnerable?

Commentary before the First Reading: 1 Kings 17:10-16

“Do not be afraid.” These words are frequent in Sacred Scriptures, but they can be a mighty big challenge at times. This reading is a good example. Due to the people’s great infidelity to God’s covenant, a terrible drought had gripped all of Israel. Many died of starvation. For a time God kept his faithful prophet Elijah alive by hiding him near a stream and having ravens bring him food to eat. Then, in verse 9 of Chapter 17, God told Elijah to go to Zarephath in the far north, where He had designated a widow to care for him. Elijah obeyed.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Is there one line in this reading that just amazes you?
2. When Elijah asked for a little bread, was he being insensitive or desperate, or was simply he obeying God?
3. When did the widow trust God: before she had seen any proof or after she witnessed what God could do?
4. Who do you think has the greater trust in God in this story – the widow or Elijah? Why?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28

Our series of readings from the Letter to the Hebrews continues today with the theme of Jesus, the High Priest. The Holy of Holies in the temple at Jerusalem was unique in all of the earth because the spirit of God had actually come and filled the room at the time it was dedicated. It was like a miniature heaven right here on earth. That is the image in this reading. Can you hear the distant trumpets heralding Christ the King? His feast is only 2 weeks away.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Is the author of the letter saying that the high priests of the Old Testament were ineffective failures?
2. Which traditional title for Jesus stresses the importance in the Jewish faith that the blood of an animal be poured out in sacrifice as a sign of the people’s sorrow for their sins and desire for forgiveness, a symbol of their own wish to die to their sins? (the _____ of God)
3. Why does Jesus not continue to offer sacrifices for sins, as did the high priests each September 10 on the Feast of Atonement, Yom Kippur, until the time of the temple’s destruction? In other words, how was his sacrifice different from theirs?
4. When will the salvation won for us by Jesus become a fulfilled reality for us?
5. A priest’s role is to be the link between God and God’s people. In what way then is Jesus the perfect priest?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Mark 12:38-44

The scribes were the Scripture experts in Jesus’ time; they preserved the word of God by hand-coping new scrolls; they knew God’s word better than anyone else. Widows, on the other hand, had no social influence and had to rely on handiwork, their estate, and the generosity of others for survival. They were both vulnerable and at the same time were often pointed out as being tremendous examples of faith. Widows had a special place in the early Church too. In fact, they were a dedicated, enrolled ministry in the Church, right next to bishops, priests, and deacons. That fact accentuates Mark’s choice of this story for his account of Jesus’ life and death.

Read the Gospel Reading out loud.

1. Speak aloud the words of this Gospel that caught your attention today?
2. Why would the scribes have received severe condemnation? What was their failure?
3. How might some scribes have been able to “devour the houses of widows?”

4. What fact made the widow's donation to the upkeep of the temple a greater sacrifice than the much larger donations of the rich?
5. In what sense could it be said that the sacrificial offering of this widow is similar to that made by Jesus?
6. How is this widow similar to the one in the First Reading?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Each of the persons at the focus of each of these readings gave all, "everything they had to live on." Have you ever had an experience of that? How did God provide for you?
2. When one has nothing left but God, how easy do you think it is to trust that God will provide what one truly needs?
3. Do you know people who tithe (give 10% of their income to Church and other charity) and still profess that God provides them with all they need, that they are never in want?
4. Why do you choose to give to the charities to which you give? How does one decide which ones to support when there are so many needy people and so many good organizations that serve them?
5. With the Christmas shopping season soon upon us, how could we prevent Christmas this year from being just another incident of "scribes giving to scribes"?

Closing Prayer (based on Psalm 18)

Lord Jesus, you gave everything for us, but we rarely give everything for you. We are afraid – afraid of being weak, afraid of not having what we need, afraid of being dependent on others, afraid of being vulnerable. You called us into relationship with you, and you want to help us to be more like you. Increase our faith so that our trust in you can increase as well. Help us to be willing to give all we have, if you ask it of us, even our lives. We ask this through your Holy Spirit and the Father who, with you, gives us life. Amen.