

HOMILY SUNDAY 32-B (Homily 03)*

“An Attitude of Faithful Gratitude”

(1 Kg 17:10-16; Psalm 146; Heb 9:24-28; Mk 12:38-44)

Gustavo Gutierrez, noted liberation theologian from Latin America, gave a lecture at Newman Theological College in St. Albert, Alberta, some years ago. At one point, he told his listeners that if they wanted to come to Latin America to help out of anger at the injustice there, then not to come. There was already had lots of angry people in Latin America, and coming would not help. And if they wanted to come out of a sense of guilt because they had so much and those in Latin America had so little, then it would be better not to come. They would not help, because there were already enough guilty people there. But if they wanted to come because they were grateful for all that God had given them, then he invited them to come – they could always use more grateful people in Latin America.

The readings today encourage us to have an attitude of faithful gratitude, and to live our lives out of that attitude of gratitude.

A background to these readings is the anointing of Jesus at Bethany by an unnamed woman. Hers was an extravagant gesture that was criticized by some of the disciples. Jesus, however, defended her actions. She was simply expressing her gratitude for the love as forgiveness that Jesus had extended to her, leading her to show much love in return. Jesus even adds that she was preparing him for his passion. Having experienced that overflowing of love, he was now more ready to face what was coming to him during his trial and crucifixion.

The widow in the first reading that Elijah visits has nothing. She is at death’s door, yet at his request responds by keeping to the full the time honoured practice of hospitality - treating guests as if they were the Lord himself. This is what she does. Imagine her faith, her trust in God, her gratitude to God for God’s love and the gift of faith, that she is able to share her meagre portion with a guest. She then experiences the miracle of the multiplication of loaves (meal) and fish (oil). Hers is an attitude of faithful gratitude.

In the gospel, Jesus is watching the people put money into the treasury, then he notices, pays particular attention to, the poor widow who put in a few meagre coins. Jesus sees her attitude of gratitude; what it was that allowed

her to part with what she needed to live on; her attitude of faith in God's providence, to trust that somehow God would take care of her. Her faith was expressed in giving alms from what she had to live on, just like the widow in the Old Testament reading with Elijah.

That is in such contrast to the Pharisees and Scribes that Jesus decries at the beginning of the gospel reading. In stark contrast to these two widows and the woman who anointed Jesus, they are proud, arrogant, self-centered, uncaring of the poor, judgmental, and critical of anyone less fortunate than them. They are also certainly opposed to Jesus who was a threat to their carefully constructed religious system that fed their own narcissism and actually oppressed the poor, the very poor whom Jesus exalts in these two passages.

The question for us posed by these readings is, how strong is our faith, and how deep is our gratitude? What is our basic attitude towards life? Are we self-seeking and self-serving, and stingy in our affairs with others, or do we have the strong faith and trust in God's presence in our lives and promises to us in Christ and the Spirit to be generous to God and to others?

There is a Portuguese saying that goes like this: what we spend our time and money on is where our treasure lies. If our faith is strong and our attitude of gratitude deep, then we will be able to be like the two widows, and extend the great gift of hospitality to all others, and our love and worship to a God that we see as loving us and caring for us in all the circumstances of our lives.

As Mother Theresa of Calcutta put it, "what we would like to do to and for Jesus, whom we cannot see, let us do it to the person next to us, whom we can see, and we will be doing it for Jesus."

The Eucharist that we now share is a humble meal, much like the flour and oil of the widow which Elijah's prayer multiplied into sustenance for them for a whole year. Only in our case, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms these humble gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, who will sustain and enliven us for an eternity as the Bread of Life,

So, let us check our attitude. Let us pray for an attitude of humble, faithful gratitude, that will express itself in extravagant gestures of love and

hospitality to others, reflecting the love and hospitality that our God shows to us all.