

Homily – 32nd Sunday of the Year B

Today, we reflect on the authentic meaning of discipleship – total surrender or total gift of self for the sake of Jesus and his Gospel. Jesus is our primary example. Our Second Reading ([Heb 9:24-28](#)) says, “Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf.” Unlike the Old Testament priests who enter into the sanctuary with blood that is not their own (i.e. animals sacrifices), Christ offered his own blood. This self-sacrifice of Jesus, of which the Mass is the liturgical expression, clearly shows that the Mass is the ‘living and perfect sacrifice’. The Eucharist is truly real presence, not a symbol. At Mass, therefore, our worship should be real and active; not a mere ritual. We must always be personally involved and “worship in spirit and in truth”. Even our offerings are not just mere donations; they are sacrifices that represent our gift of self to God. Let it always be an action of faith and the Good Lord will replenish us abundantly.

The First Reading ([1 Kgs 17:10-16](#)) shows that giving, animated by Faith, even at a time of economic crisis, could make divine favors and security easily accessible to us. Elijah visited this widow in Zarephath in a time of recession or perhaps depression (cf. Luke 4:25-26). He requested for ‘a drink’ and ‘a bit of bread’. The woman replied respectfully, “I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I ... 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.” What? Is he out of his mind? Is he insensitive to this widow’s plight? Not at all!

More importantly, how did the widow respond to Elijah’s demand? Did she begrudge him as insensitive? No! Elijah, a great prophet of God, was teaching this woman an important lesson that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2Cor 5:7). With God no situation is hopeless. Trusting in divine providence and putting God’s interest first, she rendered assistance to the prophet even in her poverty in order that God’s work should not be impeded. God’s work must go on. Accordingly, God blessed her beyond her wildest possible dreams. “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.”

What an important lesson for us, beloved, as we struggle through this recession period! Christ’s mission in his Church must go on. In sending out his disciples he said, “Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food” (Matt 10:9-10). He willed that his mission be supported by the faith and generosity of his people – through time, talent and treasure. What a blessing therefore that God gives us the opportunity to contribute to his own cause! And as we respond he blesses us in ways we cannot

imagine. In the words of St Paul, “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). Our money cannot buy us health, peace and security; only God can take care of our entire life and guarantee our future.

In the Gospel passage ([Mk 12:38-44](#) or [12:41-44](#)) Jesus indicts the leaders of God’s people who lack commitment to their duties in pursuit of worldly interests: “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. Who! God’s ministers or priests must not be carried away into a social life style to the detriment of the ministry they are called to do. The priesthood is not about fashionable clothes, secular honors, superficial celebrations of the sacraments and taking undue advantage of God’s people. It is about service (self-giving). Jesus condemns mere functionary ministrations for material gains; he calls for a deeply rooted prayerful, sacramental and liturgical commitment imbued with the spirit of Christ. The priest must be like the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. John 10:11-13). St Paul says, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2Cor 12:15). Such is the missionary zeal every priest should have in the service of God and his Church – total self-giving.

Finally, Jesus emphasizes this total self-giving in the account of the Widow’s mite. Many people misappropriate the expression, “Widow’s mite”. When they make donations from their surplus accounts, they claim they have given their widow’s mite. Jesus clarifies this for us even today; he took the trouble to observe a donation ceremony: “Many rich people put in large sums [\$1000, \$4,000 or \$20,000] more than the widow’s “two small coins worth a few cents”. We’d normally be carried away with the large donations; but for Jesus it was not a question of “HOW MUCH?” but “HOW WELL?” Accordingly, the proportion of what was given must be considered alongside what each owns (in their bank accounts). The poor widow was truly the highest donor because while she gave her two coins (i.e. “contributed [100%]) all she had, her whole livelihood”; the others “contributed from their surplus wealth” (i.e. accrued interest of their capital). So the “Widow’s Mite” means giving all that one has to live on; it goes beyond the Old Testament tithing which involves only 10% of what one owns (cf. Lev 27:30; Num 18:26). On the whole, St Paul’s advice to the early Christians to give in proportion to their income largely represents the Catholic practice (cf. 1Cor 16:1-2). Definitely the extraordinary courage and faith of these widows today are very inspiring. Such spirituality of total self-giving is implicit in this Prayer of St Francis: “O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen”