

Homily  
November 10, 2024  
32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
18:11 – 26:35

How many of you here today are widows, or widowers? Please raise your hands. This is your Sunday. Did you know that? Both the First Reading and the Gospel are about widows. Both very strong women. Women of faith. And women of hope because someone else in faith encountered them.

We see in that First Reading, Elijah...it's Elijah, right?...I was informed last night that after I said "Elijah" once, I said Ezekiel the rest of the time. Don't ask me why.

Elijah comes to Zarephath. He's desperate. Why would a prophet of God be desperate? Well, you have to look beforehand. Elijah the prophet had braced Ahaz and his wife Jezebel for their behavior. Ahaz had gone over to the fertility god, Baal, which was Jezebel's god. And Jezebel, just to put it mildly, was evil. She acted in a very bad way.

And after Elijah said what he had to say in the name of God, that your end will be bad because of the way you behave, they threaten to kill him. So he flees. He flees into the desert where God provides for him with some food and water from a river that flowed where he fled. But eventually, because part of the condemnation and come-uppance for Ahaz and Jezebel was a drought, the river dried up.

That's when he went to Zarephath. He had no food, now. He had no water. He was desperate.

And the first person he met was this widow. She was desperate, as we hear. She had very little resources left in part because of the drought. But also because she had just one son and he was younger. How she was supporting herself, it doesn't say. If you know anything about widows in the Old Testament, they very often struggled to make ends meet. Some of you widows here probably know exactly what that's like.

So, two desperate and hungry people meet each other. But what brings them most together is their faith. Because Elijah is a man of God and he gives this woman, not only a request for water and food, but then promises that God will provide for her, her son and himself. And it comes to be for a whole year, until the drought ends. But that's later in the chapter.

They come together in an encounter first fueled by desperation and hunger, but uplifted by faith, which gave them hope.

Now the widow in the Gospel, this is a different setting. She's in the Temple. Jesus has just made a pretty harsh statement about the Scribes, in the way they make the law bigger than it needed to be. We've talked about this before. And it made people do things over and above what they were capable, including widows.

But Jesus sits down in the crowd with his disciples and watches a line of the wealthy giving in support of the Temple. It's a good thing to do. She gives this little, tiny amount. But as Jesus observes, her faith and her love of this place of worship moves her to that sacrifice. She makes holy by her gift those two pennies.

Now, if you notice in the reading, Jesus does not criticize the wealthy. He simply makes a statement. They gave out of their excess. And he doesn't criticize the widow, does he?

She just gave away her livelihood. What was she thinking? In our day and age, we can't imagine it. Can we? We would call her foolish. But the passage is not really about that. It's about her faith and trust in God. And she in her want encounters a man of God, in Jesus. And she is in God's house. So she trusts and has hope.

Brothers and sisters, what can we do with this, since most of us are not widows? Well, you widows can teach us a thing or two. We should listen to widows. Don't be afraid of them. They won't hurt us. Listen to their hope and their faith. They are a gift to us.

Let them, if they have a need, or are desperate – don't be afraid of that. Go ahead and encounter it. And possibly show them a way of hope.

And if that's not enough, let me suggest this: Ask yourself, do I have the faith fueled by hope - given over by Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection and in his holy people – Do I have that to live through moments of desperation and want? Or do I have the hope and faith to encounter people who are desperate, in great need and to be a source of hope through my faith in Christ Jesus?

You don't have to be a widow to do that.