

Homily for the 32nd Sunday of the year

One of the images that shocked me to the core this last week was seeing a 12 year old Afghan girl digging her heels in the ground as the man to whom she had been sold by her father was trying to drag her away. The father explained that he had to sell her because he had no money to provide for his other children. Such poverty leading to this kind of behaviour beggars belief in the 21st century. I find myself wondering what happened to the girl and how the father is feeling, and what he will do when the money runs out as it surely will.

Poverty in the form of two widows appears in both the first reading and the Gospel this weekend. We are introduced first to Elijah the Prophet, a man of God. Times were bad, there had been no rain for months. When he came across a widow he asked for water, which she was ready to get, and then for a scrap of bread. It is now that we learn that the widow is about to bake some bread for herself and her son before they die of starvation. Elijah tells her not to be afraid and asks her to feed him first and then for her and her son to eat afterwards. If this sounds presumptuous on his part it comes with a promise that God will provide all the oil and meal that she will need in the future. What would we do in this situation? Would we take the risk, would we trust Elijah, after all the widow didn't see Elijah's God as her own. What we read is that she did take the risk, she did trust what Elijah had said and her abject poverty and destitution were rewarded, and she and her son lived on.

In the Gospel passage Jesus mentions widows twice. In the first instance they are victims, victims more over of the Scribes, religious leaders, who, we are told, exploit widows who have no one to defend them, by living off their savings. In the second example a widow is held up by Jesus as an example of sacrificial giving because although her offering consisted of two of the smallest coins in circulation, in the arithmetic of the Kingdom her offering is worth more than all the other much larger contributions. She could have kept one of the coins, but she didn't, her reckless generosity cannot be bettered. As someone once said – For Jesus, true generosity is not measured by the amount people give, but by what they have left after they give. The widow had nothing left, she couldn't give more. We often call this the story of the widow's mite, in Jesus' terms she would be named the mighty widow.

This story is well placed in Mark's Gospel because the widow typifies what Jesus will do, give himself until there is nothing left as he dies on the cross, an apparent failure until the unthinkable happens and he is raised from the dead. Every day demands are made on us and we are called to be generous with our love, with our patience, with our forgiveness, with our care, with our resources, and the good news is that when we act out of generosity which may even be reckless, perhaps especially when it is reckless, Jesus will be our constant support. Could we have helped the father who sold his daughter to feed his family, or could we do something to prevent it happening again?

Bidding Prayers for the 32nd Sunday

Celebrant:

We have listened to God's Word and proclaimed our faith and now with humility and confidence we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will encourage all its members to put their trust in God and not in material possessions.

Lord in your mercy

For those present at COP26 – that the pledges they make for the betterment of our world will be fulfilled, so that those most in danger of climate change will be given greater security.

Lord in your mercy

For our political leaders and those with huge financial resources – that they will work for a fairer distributions of the world's resources so that everyone will have sufficient on which to live.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are sick in body, mind or spirit and especially for those suffering from dementia and their families and carers – that they will receive the love and support they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disasters and the COVID 19 pandemic, for Catherine Reed a former parishioner who died last week, for those in the Book of Remembrance in front of the altar, and Winifred Ash, Mary Smith, Margaret Dalby, Joseph Carr, Mary Neale and Edith Hunt whose anniversaries occur this week = that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary....

Celebrant:

All loving God, help us to be like the widow in today's Gospel who, out of trusting dependence on you, gave not from her wealth but from her poverty. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen