

Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 8, 2015

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the focus of our Sunday readings turns to the end times and to what is expected of those who claim to be faithful disciples of the living God.

As disciples, we are expected to know and live out the covenant relationship that God has initiated and we have accepted. Jesus is the model by which we are to live as Christians. We will be judged in the end according to our effectiveness in living our lives by Jesus' values and lifestyle.

And so the popular phrase, "What Would Jesus Do?" should become the constant discerning process that we must engage in so that we can become faithful in our discipleship. Today's readings offer a great deal of wisdom and reflection that is designed to challenge us in this part of our spiritual lives.

Psalm 146, the responsorial psalm for today, focuses our attention on God's job description as the God who "gives sight to the blind ... raises up those who are bowed down ... loves the just ... protects strangers," and sustains "the fatherless and the widow."

The biblical image of the widow is very powerful. In a patriarchal culture, she had no economic, political or social status. Since she had no male to provide for her, her daily existence was harsh to say the least.

Widows had no one to speak on their behalf and so were easily taken advantage of by the greedy and the powerful. This was also the case for orphans and aliens or strangers.

Our readings today make it clear that if we claim to be disciples, then we too must attune ourselves to the needs of the truly powerless in our world.

Not only are we called are to help those on the economic and social fringes of society in order to meet their needs; but we should open our eyes to the fact that they have much to teach *us* about faith, trust and the risk necessary in becoming God's disciples.

In the first reading from 1 Kings, we encounter an unnamed widow providing for her son who is willing to share their last scrap of food with a total stranger. She is a gentile who doesn't know the Jewish God or Elijah the prophet. She has nothing. And still, she is concerned enough for a stranger that she is willing to share even the last bit of food she has.

The risk she is willing to take, along with her care for a stranger, shows her to be a woman of faith and trust in the face of almost insurmountable odds. That kind of giving and care for others is rewarded a hundredfold by God, who fulfills our needs beyond all expectations.

Our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews pictures Christ in the same way as the widow. Christ was willing to give himself completely for others. And in so doing, God greatly exalted Him and blessed all of creation through Him by making Christ the vehicle of God's love relationship with humanity for all eternity.

Like the widow, Christ is our model of the faith, trust and complete giving of self for others that is the true sign of any disciple.

Mark's Gospel contrasts the attitude of arrogance, superiority and power of some scribes and even His own disciples, with the risk-taking, faith and trust of a poor nameless widow.

While they seem to lord it over others, she gives everything she has. While the religious leaders "devour the house of widows," she gives in trust, expressing her care and concern for others.

Like Jesus and the other widow in the first reading, she becomes the ultimate example of true discipleship.

Today there are so many ways that money and possessions control our lives and our decisions. It becomes hard for us to part with what we have.

Giving from our need for the sake of others won't change the world overnight. But it will change us. And that's a very good start.