

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – November 8, 2015

One of my favourite hikes in BC takes you up a mountainside, through Glacier Gulch to Twin Falls. Praying today's psalm is like coming around the outcrop of rock near the foot of the falls. You are immediately blasted by the vapour-laden wind generated by the falls – within seconds you are simultaneously drenched and nearly swept off your feet. If you don't mind risking hypothermia, you could continue to climb and stand under the water that cascades off the glacier – not recommended!

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine yourself under this marvellous waterfall described in the psalm:

God:

Keeps faith forever

Executes justice for the oppressed

Gives food to the hungry

Sets prisoners free

Opens the eyes of the blind

Lifts up those who are bowed down

Loves the righteous

Watches over strangers

Upholds the widow and orphan.

Such an abundance of gifts that they sweep us off our feet and drench us, drown us in their generosity. This is the love that we celebrate when we gather, for which we give thanks, which we receive as we celebrate.

How do we respond to this abundance of love? That really is the question for us today as we listen to the readings today; the widow of Zarephath, the example of Jesus and the widow in the temple give us a standard by which we can measure our response. We are first of all invited to reflect prayerfully on this "waterfall of gifts" God gives us each day.

How have I experienced this abundance of gifts this past week? What particular gifts am I most aware of having received? What was my response? Was it gratitude or complacency? Was it with a spirit of generosity or of selfishness or even greed? What did I do with the gifts God gave me? It's in light of this last question that I'd like to focus for a moment on the two widows.

What is happening in the two stories we have today? In both cases, the widows responded with incredible generosity and love. The widow of Zarephath responded to Elijah's request for a simple meal, a beggar's meal. She did this even though she had very little and needed to feed herself and her son. We are told that God provided a miracle and her meal and oil never ran out. The widow in the temple gave her two small coins to the temple treasury to provide for the needs of worship and of the temple workers. Jesus praises her for her generosity.

But, what is really going on? In both cases, the women make great sacrifices! What they give could cost them their lives. The first widow gave the last of her meal and oil to make a small cake for Elijah to eat, knowing that she and her son were going to eat that and then die of starvation. She didn't just give something, or even a lot – she gave everything, even the possibility of staying alive! In the Gospel, Jesus makes the same claim about the two coins which were “all she had to live on”.

The question then for each of us isn't “Am I generous” but rather “Am I willing to make a great sacrifice?” If the answer to that is no, then I need to ask myself what holds me back. Is it fear that God will not continue to provide the same abundant blessing of gifts that I have been given all my life? Is it a lack of trust, not having that poverty of spirit mentioned in last week's Gospel, a spirit that knows that everything I have comes from God, and that I am entirely dependent on God? Is it pride or greed that won't allow me to let go of some of the things that I treasure? Is it a feeling that I couldn't live without these particular things or treasures, or that in some way my life would be lacking or diminished? So many things can hold us back, but God's Word reminds us today that being a disciple is about sacrifice. Am I willing to sacrifice, not just give?