

## Homily: 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B) 2021

Imagine that you're in a large crowd of people. You've come to listen to a noted speaker, a man of great spiritual wisdom who has made a name for Himself. What you've heard has been excellent, inspiring. But it's been a long day, and you've had nothing to eat. Perhaps it's time to leave. Then, unexpectedly, the teacher's disciples come round with baskets of bread and fish, and you can eat to your fill. You end the day with your mind full of teaching, your stomach full of food, and your heart full of hope. But where did the food come from? You presume that the teacher had His own supply; but in fact, He has taken a small amount – five loaves and two fish – that were given Him by a little boy, and has multiplied that small gift many times over. You didn't notice the little boy – he was too small, and his gift too insignificant; but in many ways, the whole feast rested on this apparently meagre offering.

At the other end of the scale there are those who give a great deal, and make a great show of their giving. The scribes, for example, offer lengthy prayers to God, but they love people to notice. And they do many other things to attract attention to themselves and their good works. Then there are those who come to the treasury in the temple, rich people who can contribute a great deal. All the money is coins, and it's thrown into metal containers, so they can make plenty of noise and get plenty of attention. Yet the widow who comes, like the small boy, is unimportant and insignificant in the eyes of the world. Like the boy, she has little to give. Like the boy, she gives all she has. And whilst others may dismiss these small offerings, Jesus notices and accepts them, and holds them up as an example to us.

There is something inspiring about someone who gives their all. Occasionally we hear of some outstandingly generous person who devotes their life to good works, not thinking of their own wellbeing but giving everything to help others. This poor widow gives "everything she had to live on". She only had two coins – even if she had given one, it would have been impressive. But she gave two; she did not hold anything back. 2000 years on, we don't know any details of the rich people who gave a great deal that day, but we do remember this poor widow and her tiny offering, because that tiny offering was literally everything to her.

The very next line in the Gospel tells us that Jesus then left the Temple. He never returned to it. Within a few days He was arrested, sentenced and crucified and buried. By pointing out the poor widow's offering, He is opening our eyes to what He is doing for us: He, too, is giving His all, everything, for our salvation. He does not give from what He has left over; His self-offering is perfect, complete. The people of the time expected a Messiah who would lead a great uprising against the Romans, a leader who would overturn the world order and bring about a glorious new kingdom for the Jewish people. The sort of messiah who would be like the rich, pouring vast amounts of money into the treasury in a way that no-one could miss. But Jesus is not this kind of messiah. He is one who gives His all, instead of seeking His own glory; He makes an offering which did not change the political order but, in fact, recreated the world. When He died on the cross it can't have looked like much: just another criminal being executed by the Romans. It was probably of little interest to most of

the people in Jerusalem. It certainly didn't appear that the world was being changed. One man on a cross: such a small offering in the face of all the world's injustice, sin and suffering. But this is not just one man: this is God on a cross. And this offering, this total self-giving, was made in perfect love. From the cross, Jesus looked out on the crowds of the world, the people of every place and time, and saw all our need of love, forgiveness and salvation. That's why He gave Himself. And, as small as it might seem, His offering brings salvation to the entire world.

The widow in today's first reading also points us to Jesus. Elijah meets her in the middle of a lengthy drought, and asks her for water and food. She has almost nothing; the tiny amount she does have, she will cook for herself and her son, then they will starve to death. But she is generous, and is willing to share this meagre portion. She gives, even though it will hasten her death. But she does not die; in fact, her offering is multiplied, much like the loaves and fish, and she lives through the famine on these scraps, until the Lord sends rain again. Her giving saves her life. As the Lord teaches: "The one who keeps his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake will find it." Through giving we receive; by dying to ourselves, we find life. This is the way of Jesus: death and resurrection.

Each time we celebrate Mass, we remember His sacrifice. We do this in memory of Him, as He commanded. We see before us the total self-giving of Jesus: His Body broken for us, His Blood shed for us. He keeps nothing for Himself. Here we see the apparently tiny offering that has redeemed the whole world. And from this offering, still today Jesus feeds the crowds. In the Bread of the Eucharist, we see the self-giving of Jesus, who in this sacrament shares with us the fruits of His saving death. Perhaps what we do here sometimes feels small and insignificant. Certainly, it's largely unnoticed by the world around us. But to us who have faith, we see here how Jesus offers Himself for us as the gift of perfect love which is transforming the world and leading us to glory.

Fr Andrew

