

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Homily, 2024

The Gospel we just heard is sometimes called: “The Story of the Widow’s Mite”—or simply: “The Widow’s Mite”.

So, what is a mite? Well, in Jesus’ time, it is a...coin...a very small coin...about the size of the top of a pencil eraser. So, very small.

Now, we may tend to think of “The Widow’s Mite” as a lesson in giving, and a great sacrifice. And that is true.

It is a lesson we need to hear every so often.

But looking over the readings for today, from the book of Kings and from Mark’s Gospel, I am struck by something else. There is another theme, and it casts a bright beam of helpful light into these two scripture proclamations today.

Both are about giving, yes. But... they are also about something quite unexpected.

They are about the loss of a loved one...and what happens after a loved one dies.

Remember...the two women in today’s scriptures are widows. Once, they loved someone, and they daily interacted with that person—they hugged that person—they talked with and laughed with—they helped that person.

But death has changed things. One change is they are both struggling just to stay alive. It is possible these widows may be beggars on the city streets near the Jewish Temple.

In Jesus’ time, if a woman became a widow, and had no family to support her, and had no significant amount of money socked away somewhere, her life would be extremely hard. She might literally be living day-to-day...and hand-to-mouth.

A widow in Jesus’ day would have a hard enough time just taking care of herself, and her children, let alone anyone else.

And yet.... And yet...

The widows we meet today do the opposite. Instead of penny-pinching for themselves—instead of MITE-pinching—they surrender to a higher call—to honor God—and to help others through the Jewish Temple. The widows give of themselves, however they can, whatever they can. A little flour—a couple of tiny coins. They hold nothing back. And...they are blessed.

It calls to mind another widow who was blessed: Mary. Maybe Jesus sees that widow at the treasury and thinks of his own mother—thinks about what she sacrificed—what she had—and what she lost. She may very well have had to struggle to make ends meet. So, Jesus knows the value of those two small coins. He understands where the widow at the treasury is coming from. He has seen it for himself.

And he understands what that widow at the temple is doing. She does not hold back. She lets...go. She does not take. She gives.

That is a lesson we may all find useful and helpful. We may suffer terrible losses that rob us of those we love. We may grieve, and we may feel alone, and we may ask ourselves “Why?”

But Jesus seems to be saying: “The way through loss...is love. Opening our hearts. Giving of ourselves. Holding little or even nothing back.”

The other day, I got an email about a little girl named Elena Desserich who can give us another example of giving wholeheartedly.

When Elena was five years old, the only thing she wanted to be when she grew up was a mom. She also loved art class, and she loved drawing. She loved dresses with laces and ruffles. Her favorite color was pink. Whenever she played school, she always wanted to be the teacher. She liked babies and headbands and her pet Chihuahua, Sally.

But just after she turned six, Elena was diagnosed with a rare brain cancer. She was given only a few months to live. The disease at first took away her ability to speak.

Then, it took away much of her eyesight. But before the disease could take away everything, Elena did something unusual—and remarkable—with the time she had. She began to write. Nothing elaborate.

Just simple notes. “I love you Mom and Dad.” Or to her sister: “I love you Mom and Dad and Grace.” She would color in lopsided hearts, and she would misspell “YOU” as “YUO.” The writing was crooked, and she did not always color inside the lines of the hearts she was drawing. But the words were the same. “I love you.”

She wrote dozens of these notes. Then, after writing the notes, Elena would hide them around the house. Months after Elena passed, her parents were still finding them in out-of-the-way places—tucked away—hidden love notes from Elena. “I love you, Mom and Dad.” She wanted these words to be found after she was gone.

Her parents eventually collected all the notes and published them, along with Elena’s story.

They are in a book that is still raising money for cancer research. It is called—fittingly—“Notes Left Behind”.

What can a six-year-old child give? Elena gave her heart in the only way she could. Like the widows in our scriptures, she gave as much as she was able.

What matters, really, is simply to give. Even in the midst of our difficult, even shattering losses.

This month of November, you and I may have been remembering our own losses. On All Souls Day, on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, we remembered the names of parishioners and of our other loved ones who died. As people of faith, we are like the widows in our scriptures: We have all been touched by the passing away of loved ones. And, so, we pray for those whom we have lost.

But even beyond our own sadness—beyond our personal loss—we all carry with us some sadness...and some hurt.

There are a thousand smaller passings that leave a mark on us. Marks of injustice. Of abuse. Of betrayal. Of infidelity. Of anxieties and fears. We may feel the world is unfair and out to get us. We may carry scars others cannot see.

But the Gospel today carries a beautiful message for us: the answer is not in a closed fist. It is in an open hand. A hand that gives. A hand that holds little back or nothing back.

Saint Mother Teresa famously said,  
“We may be able to do only small things, but we can do them with GREAT love.”

It may be something as small as a coin—or a note—or a whispered prayer. But we need to offer it. We need to offer it with generous love. A love that holds little—and as much as possible—nothing back.

Remember the widow Jesus sees at the Temple Treasury. Remember a little girl named...Elena.

Because the way through loss...is love. The way through fear...is faith.

**And so we ask ourselves: How can we live that love? How can we share that faith? What can WE give?**

**Plz give it some thought....**