



Contributed by Father Raphael Ma, C.R.

Father Raphael professed first vows as a Resurrectionist on August 15th 2015, and was ordained a Priest on June 15th, 2019. He is originally from Markham, Ontario, and is currently assigned to several community ministries for the Congregation of the Resurrection, including vocations, and our lay association: the Apostles of the Resurrection.

THIRTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
November 7, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

I suppose I should have thought about this when my paternal grandfather died, leaving my grandmother a widow, but I was only in seventh grade back then, and did not think a whole lot about other people in those days. My grandmother also lived with my family in our home, and our lives largely revolved around her schedule, so I guess I assumed her needs were more or less taken care of. But when my mother died, I remember beginning to worry about my father, who would now be living alone—and then being surprised to discover just how many other widows and widowers we knew at our parish, many of whom were daily Mass-goers.

Widows are front and centre in our readings today, in our first reading and our Gospel. And I think it is appropriate, then, for us to reflect on widows and widowers, and the often silent, but very generous ways they are involved in our parishes and other communities. But not only that: individual widows are important figures in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, there is Ruth (who does remarry), and Judith (who does not). In the New Testament there are the unnamed widows like the one in our Gospel today, and the widow of Nain. There's a widow in the parable of the persistent widow who humorously pesters an unjust judge to grant her request. And then there is Dorcas, an example of the widows who were part of the community of the early Church, and more or less formed the precursors of religious life. And then the Scriptures are full of God's concern for widows and orphans, and the punishments that await those who oppress them.

Finally, in the history of the Church, there are many widows who became saints – learning about their lives can be an inspiration and also perhaps a consolation for those who have lost a spouse: St. Monica, St. Paula, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Bl. Angela of Foligno, St. Elizabeth of Portugal, St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Rita of Cascia, St. Frances of Rome, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Jane de Chantal, St. Marie of the Incarnation, St. Louise de Marillac, St. Marguerite d'Youville, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and others.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Some questions to reflect on by yourself or with a group:

1. Who are some of the widows and widowers in your life (and perhaps you yourself are a widow or widower)? How has becoming a widow or widower changed the way they (or you) see and live their (or

your) faith? What kind of supports or resources are available to widows and widowers to help them see and live their situation in the light of faith?

2. We can ask these same questions about those we know who are divorced, who in a sense find themselves faced with some of the same challenges.

The Table of the Word

Recently I was on a little pilgrimage with a classmate of mine to St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal for the year of St. Joseph. We arrived in the evening and went up to make a first visit to the shrine, and to pray. As I sat in the Blessed Sacrament chapel behind the main altar, I allowed my eyes to follow the large green Vermont marble columns, up to a dome – on the base of which were the names of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the order which they appear in the book of the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 11, verses 2-3: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

In my experience, the word “pious” is often used in a dismissive fashion these days – for example, when someone is described as being “overly pious” on account of their various (and sometimes seemingly ostentatious) external expressions of religiosity. At times, the word can also be used to describe someone in a positive fashion – for example “so and so is very pious,” where it is a synonym for being “very religious” – again, on account of external expressions that can be observed. But what we see in this Sunday's readings – particularly in the Gospel – is that external expressions of religiosity are not necessarily a sign of real piety.

What, then, is “real piety” – as in the gift of the Holy Spirit? St. Thomas Aquinas held that, just as the virtue of piety renders its duties and loyalty or reverence to one's parents, relatives, and country, so the gift of the Holy Spirit which is called piety is when we are moved to offer that same kind of love toward God – who is our heavenly Father – the saints, and our heavenly homeland. And he cites Romans 8:15 as an example: “you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

It is that love of God – like the love of children for their parents – that is at the heart of real piety, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Of course, it is difficult for us to know whether external expressions of spirituality really flow from this love – but it is also God's place, and not ours, to make that judgment. It is enough for us to heed Jesus' warning to beware and not assume that what we see externally is always the full story. Similarly, we should ask God to send us His Spirit so that the way we live our faith is truly a fruit of the gift of piety which we received in Baptism, and which was strengthened in Confirmation.

Penitential Rite:

Leader: “Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf”

Lord Jesus, you execute justice for the oppressed,
Lord Jesus, you uphold the orphan and the widow,
Lord Jesus, you lift up those who are bowed down,

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray: (together)

Almighty and merciful God, graciously keep from us all adversity,
so that, unhindered in mind and body alike,
we may pursue in freedom of heart the things that are yours.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (1 Kings 17.10-16)

A reading from the first book of Kings.

there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink."

As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth'."

She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as her and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Hebrews 9.24-28)

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with the blood that is not his own; for then he would have to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world.

But as it is, Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that comes the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 12.38-44)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus was teaching in the temple, and a large crowd was listening to him. He said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow two minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

Lectio Divina means “sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

First Reading:

This passage does sort of seem like Elijah is making a selfish request – asking to be taken care of first before the widow prepares her last meal for herself and her son. But it is important for us to remember that this did not originate with Elijah, because in the verse that comes just before this, God had commanded Elijah to go to find this widow. And the widow's response – though it begins with a protest, as so often our responses to God also begin – eventually is an act of faith: “She went and did as Elijah said.”

But it's interesting that no further details are given – did the widow believe just like that and go make the cake? Or did she sort of begrudgingly make it, and see what would happen? And what does it really mean to say that the jar of meal was not emptied or that the jug of oil did not fail? It doesn't say that the jar was replaced with a barrel of meal, or the jug was replaced with a large vessel of oil – only that the jar did not empty nor did the jug fail. Imagine what it would have been like for the widow to return to the jar and jug each day – did she wonder if it was going to finally run out? Or at some point did that doubt turn into faith?

Second Reading:

One major focus of the letter to the Hebrews is to show that Jesus is in fact the fulfillment of all priesthood in the Old Testament. Often in baptismal preparation meetings, when I explain the post-baptismal anointing with Sacred Chrism, I mention that in the Old Testament, three categories of people were anointed: priests, prophets, and kings. Jesus has all three roles – and is their fulfillment – so usually I ask the parents and godparents: “How do you think Jesus is a priest, prophet, and a king?” Consistently, the one that they seem to be the least familiar with is how Jesus is a priest. They tend to associate priests with what they see at Mass: preaching. But that's what prophets do. The main role of a priest in all religions throughout history, is to offer sacrifice. Once I point that out, they easily connect the dots – the sacrifice Jesus offered was Himself.

Although we take it for granted that Jesus' death was a sacrifice, that was not necessarily a connection that the early Christians had made, and so the letter to the Hebrews likely helped many to make this connection, as we hear: “...so Christ, having been offered once” [Hebrews 9:28].

The letter also speaks to Jesus' intercessory role for us in Heaven by virtue of His one sacrifice, “now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” The most significant, complex, and impressive offering in the Jewish year was the offering made on the Day of Atonement, also called Yom Kippur. It involved several different sacrifices, several washings by full immersion between the various sacrifices, several changes of garments, and entering the Holy of Holies several times. It is this great offering that the author of the letter is referring to when he mentions the high priest entering “the Holy Place year after year.”

Yet, Jesus' sacrifice of himself once for all, was even greater than, and was the fulfillment of all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, including the Day of Atonement. Many of the elements of our second reading are present in the Mass. It is that same sacrifice, once for all, that becomes present again for us at every celebration of the Eucharist. It is there that we join Jesus in His intercessory role in Heaven, as we pray for the Church, the needs of the world, that we ask for the intercession of the saints, and pray for our

beloved dead, all during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass. And we do all this “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ” as the priest says after the Our Father. The author of the letter of the Hebrews also says, that Christ “will appear a second time,” “to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

Gospel:

In the book of the prophet Malachi, we hear: “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” [Malachi 3:1], and that He will bear witness against those who oppress widows [Malachi 3:5]. This seems to be happening in our Gospel today. Jesus, the Lord, has come to the temple, and is commenting about how the scribes “devour widows’ houses.”

Although a few verses earlier, there is a scribe whom Jesus praises as being “not far from the kingdom of God” [Mark 12: 34], in today’s Gospel, Jesus is telling people to beware of scribes. Perhaps to most people, scribes, as a social class of religiously learned Jews, were just assumed to be correct about religious things. This is not unlike the way many people still see priests and religious today, as a kind of “religious expert.” And even though the clergy sex-abuse and cover-up, as well as the abuse that happened in residential schools, are known to all, still we can tend to persist in this sort of “religious expert” view of priests and religious. And so in Jesus’ day, it would have been important for the crowd to hear His warning clearly, to beware of “religious experts.”

The “long robe” that Jesus mentions is likely the *Tallit*, the Jewish prayer shawl we see today worn during prayer. Longer and more visible, the *Tallit* would have probably been admired, as a sign of the scribes’ regular commitment to prayer. However, Jesus here is criticizing such ostentatious “prayerfulness” which He later points out when He comments that they say long prayers for the sake of appearance.

According to Jewish tradition at the time, greetings were to be initiated by those of lower rank in terms of knowledge of the law. Scribes, being more learned, would expect to be greeted by others, rather than initiate the greeting, as a recognition of their purportedly superior knowledge of the law. Having the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets would have been for similar reasons.

Jesus’ observation at the end of today’s Gospel about the widow putting in more than all the others who were contributing to the Temple treasury is the exact opposite what He had told people to beware of about the scribes. If the scribes emphasized visible “religiosity,” yet what they do in reality will receive the greater condemnation, here the widow represents hidden and unknown piety, which receives the greater commendation and praise from the Lord who has suddenly come to the Temple.

(Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. How do you picture the widow’s response to Elijah’s request? How would you respond to Elijah?
2. Do you see the celebration of the Eucharist as participating in Jesus’ priestly role of offering sacrifice interceding? As an act of hopeful expectation of His return at the end of time?
3. What external expressions of religiosity or spirituality are part of your life? Would you say they flow from the Holy Spirit’s gift of piety?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** "...but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."
2. **Suggestion for the Week:** Reach out to someone who is a widow or widower, or someone who has experienced divorce, and see how they are doing.
3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Now we turn to the Lord with our prayers and petitions.

For Pope Francis and the Church throughout the world, as we begin our journey together towards the next Synod in 2023, we pray to the Lord...

For all those who are struggling, especially those who are widowed or those who are divorced, we pray to the Lord...

For the leaders of our communities, that they will keep in mind those who are disadvantaged, we pray to the Lord...

For vocations to the consecrated life, we pray to the Lord...

For those who have died, especially those who have died alone, that they may enter into the fullness of God's kingdom, and that those who mourn for them may be comforted, we pray to the Lord...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)
Nourished by this sacred gift, O Lord,
we give you thanks,
and beseech your mercy,
that, by the pouring forth of your Spirit,
the grace of integrity may endure
in those whom your heavenly power has entered.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,
OUR FATHER ...**

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (*Celebrating the Word* was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).