

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

**The Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time—B

## Reading I

### 1 Kings 17:10-16

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath.  
As he arrived at the entrance of the city,  
a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her,  
"Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink."  
She left to get it, and he called out after her,  
"Please bring along a bit of bread."  
She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives,  
I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar  
and a little oil in my jug.  
Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks,  
to go in and prepare something for myself and my son;  
when we have eaten it, we shall die."  
Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid.  
Go and do as you propose.  
But first make me a little cake and bring it to me.  
Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son.  
For the LORD, the God of Israel, says,  
'The jar of flour shall not go empty,  
nor the jug of oil run dry,  
until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'"  
She left and did as Elijah had said.  
She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well;  
the jar of flour did not go empty,  
nor the jug of oil run dry,  
as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (1b) **Praise the Lord, my soul!**  
The LORD keeps faith forever,  
    secures justice for the oppressed,  
    gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets captives free.  
R. **Praise the Lord, my soul!**

The LORD gives sight to the blind.

The LORD raises up those who were bowed down;  
the LORD loves the just.

The LORD protects strangers.

**R. Praise the Lord, my soul!**

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,  
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;  
your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.

**R. Praise the Lord, my soul!**

## **Reading II**

### **Hebrews 9:24-28**

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands,  
a copy of the true one, but heaven itself,  
that he might now appear before God on our behalf.  
Not that he might offer himself repeatedly,  
as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary  
with blood that is not his own;  
if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly  
from the foundation of the world.  
But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages  
to take away sin by his sacrifice.  
Just as it is appointed that human beings die once,  
and after this the judgment, so also Christ,  
offered once to take away the sins of many,  
will appear a second time, not to take away sin  
but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

## **Alleluia**

### **Matthew 5:3**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

# Gospel

## Mark 12:38-44

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds,  
"Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes  
and accept greetings in the marketplaces,  
seats of honor in synagogues,  
and places of honor at banquets.  
They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext  
recite lengthy prayers.  
They will receive a very severe condemnation."

He sat down opposite the treasury  
and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury.  
Many rich people put in large sums.  
A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.  
Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them,  
"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more  
than all the other contributors to the treasury.  
For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth,  
but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had,  
her whole livelihood."

## Exegesis

### 1 Kings 17:10-16

Elijah served as a dedicated prophet of Yahweh in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. He came from Gilead, east of the Jordan, where worship of Yahweh at that time was strong and pure. Elijah in Hebrew is *Eliyahu* which means “Yahweh is my God.” Elijah was called by God to serve as a prophet to Israel during the reign of King Ahab. Ahab was married to Jezebel, a princess of Tyre, who was devoted to the Phoenician god Baal. Baal was the pagan god of nature and fertility. Ahab, at his wife’s bequest, had a temple constructed for the worship of Baal. Jezebel imported hundreds of prophets of Baal into Samaria and set out to kill the prophets of Yahweh. Ahab was torn between his faith in Yahweh and devotion to his wife and her faith in the pagan god Baal. As Jezebel was having the prophets of Yahweh put to death Obadiah, the master of the king’s palace, took 100 prophets of Yahweh, hid them in two separate caves, and brought them food and water to sustain them.

Amid this conflict, Elijah, called by Yahweh, entered Ahab’s court to announce to the king that there would be a terrible drought. The worshipers of Baal believed that it was their god who had the power over life, nature and fertility. The series of events that follow would prove that Yahweh, and not the god Baal, had power over the forces of nature.

The drought and famine that followed devastated the country such that even the king was suffering to stay alive and was forced to search for water and grass to keep the animals alive. Elijah returned to his homeland east of the Jordan by the Wadi Cherith. In time even the Wadi ran dry, and Yahweh sent Elijah to Zarephath of Sidon. This is pagan territory and the homeland of Queen Jezebel. Yahweh would now display His power even in pagan territory, the home of Baal worshipers.

The story that now unfolds with the Widow of Zarephath and her son, reminds me of the experience of Abraham and Isaac. By giving her all, the widow is basically giving her life and the life of her son to Elijah, the man of God. It is an incredible display of faith. God in turn saves the widow and her son by supplying them with food for over a year. When the son died, Yahweh brought him back to life through the hands of Elijah.

Similarly, just as Yahweh provided manna and water for the people in the desert in flight from Egypt, He supplied Elijah with food and water for his journey. Yahweh protects the weak and gives life to the lowly. He is the defender of widows and orphans and the most vulnerable and marginalized of His beloved children.

What follows in Chapter 18 of *1 Kings* is the famous challenge of Elijah to the prophets of Baal and of Ashera on Mount Carmel. After 450 prophets of Baal and 450 prophets of Ashera fail, Elijah, in the name of Yahweh, calls down rain to soak the altar of sacrifice and then fire to set it ablaze. The power of Yahweh is on full display and the drought is ended.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

Psalm 146 consists of 10 verses. It is entitled *Trust in God the Creator and Redeemer*. It begins and ends with the exclamation *Hallelujah!* *Hallelujah* is a Hebrew word that means to give exaltation with praise and thanksgiving. The entire psalm is a song of praise and thanksgiving to God as creator and sustainer of life and savior.

In verse 1 the Hebrew word that is translated as *Lord* is *Yahweh*. The word that we translate as *soul* is *nepes*. The word that is translated as *God* also in verse 1 is *Elohim* in the original Hebrew. The word in verse 4 that is translated as *breath* or *breathing* is *ruah*. In this short song all three names for God that appear in the OT are present, i.e., *Yahweh*, *Elohim* and *Ruah*. *Yahweh* is typically used to describe the all-powerful transcendent creator God. *Elohim* appears more often when describing the immanent presence of God and *Ruah* appears to describe the Spirit of God as in the Spirit that hovered over the waters of creation. The glory of the Trinity of God flows from this song of praise and thanksgiving.

These words also are prevalent in the creation story specifically with the creation of humanity. The Lord (*Yahweh*) God (*Elohim*) formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed His life breath (*nesamah*) into him and man became a living being (*nepes*). (Gen 2:7). It is interesting that the word for breath in the creation story is *nesamah* which describes the natural flow of air in and out in the normal rhythm of breathing. The creation story tells us that this is God's breath flowing into human nostrils. Psalm 146 uses the word *ruah* for breath when describing real death, i.e. *breathing (ruah) his last and returning to earth*. The psalmist is describing the person who does not have *Yahweh* as their God and savior, those who do not place their trust in God.

The psalm glories in our God *who keeps faith (emet) forever*. The understanding of *emet* and later the Greek NT translation *pistis*, connotes more than an ascent of the mind and heart, more than a creed that we recite. Faith describes a mutual indwelling presence of divine and human life in the soul (*nepes*).

Psalm 146 sings glory and praise and thanksgiving to our triune God who creates, sustains life and is savior. *Yahweh* is a God who is faithful forever. He is a God who rescues the blind and the bowed down, who protects the alien, the orphan and the widow who shall reign forever through all generations. *Hallelujah!*

### Hebrews 9:24-28

Our passage today from *Hebrews* continues to stress the fact that Jesus is the final sacrifice offered once for all. Not like the high priest who entered the sanctuary once every year on the Day-of-Atonement, Jesus now offers His own blood for all. He is the one perfect unblemished lamb, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. *Christ offered once to take away the sins of many*. This verse echoes Isaiah 53:12: "He surrendered Himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and He shall take away the sins of many." The Hebrew word that we translate as *many* in Isaiah is *rab*. The Semitic understanding can also mean *all*. The Greek word *anaphero* can mean either "to take away" or "to bear". The word provides a deeper understanding of the reality described here as Jesus takes away our sins precisely in bearing our sins Himself.



## Exegesis (Continued)

### Mark 12:38-44

Our selected Gospel passage today is sometimes broken down into two separate stories, i.e., *The Denunciation of the Scribes* (vss. 38-40) and *The Poor Widow's Contribution* (vss. 41-44). The Church guided by the Holy Spirit brings them together for us today and the attention that Jesus gives to the widow in both passages seems to tie them together as well.

The Scribes were both lawyers and theologians as the law that they interpreted and enforced was the Torah. Although Jesus calls out the hypocrisy of the scribes and often found Himself in opposition to them, they were not all bad. Jesus had just affirmed one of the Scribes and told him that he was not far from the Kingdom of God (see 12:28-34). Jesus knows their hearts and He calls out the ostentatiousness that He has observed. They sat in the first seats in the Synagogues to be seen. The first seats often faced the congregation so that they sure could be noticed. As Jesus continues, He goes deeper and reveals their dishonesty and hypocrisy as well. The dishonesty includes using their prestige and power to take advantage of widows and the powerless. Their hypocrisy includes not practicing what they preach and praying in public not to honor God but to be seen. Jesus points out the wealthy who made sure they were seen putting large sums of money into the treasury.

A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Widows at the time of Jesus were most often very poor and vulnerable. There were no inheritance rights when their husband died. They typically had no way of earning a living. They had to depend on their children for sustenance or rely on charity to survive. There were no social safety nets for them.

The small copper coins that she contributed to the temple treasury were the smallest of circulated currency. They were equal to 1/64 of a daily wage. A daily wage would typically support a small family for one day. It was worth less than one day's sustenance. Jesus said that she gave all that she had. It would have taken an incredible amount of faith in God to give of her only livelihood. Essentially, she was giving her life to God.

This quiet unassuming act of the poor widow stands in stark contrast with the ostentatiousness of the scribes and the wealthy who were giving of their surplus only to promote themselves and to be noticed. Jesus is reminding us that He knows our innermost thoughts and our intentions. He is also reminding us of our need to care for the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized among us. Remember that this incident immediately follows Jesus's teaching on the commandment of love of God and of our neighbor.

## Reflection

Did you ever wonder why the word “only” appears in that famous Gospel passage, John 3:16? “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” It certainly implies that God is giving His all, His one and only, to us. Jesus certainly gives His all to us as He pours out His life for us on the Cross. Even in death blood and water flowed upon the world from His pierced side. He totally empties Himself for us.

Our response to this total outpouring of love always falls short because of our human frailty. Our natural tendencies are to hold back, to reserve a little for the future. We think with finite minds that are always calculating the cost. Both widows in our scripture this weekend give everything that they have. They give their lives to God. The Widow of Zarephath gave everything that she and her son had to eat to the Man of God, Elijah. In effect she is giving her only son as well as her own life. It was a time of great drought and famine. She had nothing left and no way of replenishing what little that she had. Even though she knew that it would cost her life and the life of her only son, she gave everything that she had. But then the miracle happened, “The jar of flour did not go empty, nor did the jug of oil run dry, as the Lord had foretold through Elijah.” In a similar way the widow in our Gospel this weekend gives all that she has to live on, two small coins worth only a penny.

Both widows gave their lives to God. There was no social security system at the time of Jesus. Widows and orphans who had no means of support or family to look after them would most often die of malnutrition or famine. Think of the sacrifice that both widows made. Think of the trust that they must have had to give everything to God. What faith!

The lesson is obviously to give our all and to trust in God. The reality is that God’s love has no limits. God is love and God is infinite. When we give love away, we are always replenished. The jar and the jug will never go empty, the more that we give away the more that we receive. In fact, God’s love is multiplied as it is given away. It becomes like an atomic reaction that explodes though the universe. It can become as a raging fire. Remember the words of Jesus, “I have come to ignite a fire on the earth, and how I wish that it were a blazing.” The great fire of love that Jesus is calling for must begin with the tiny spark within each one of us. All we have to do is to give our all and the fire of love will ignite and spread. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,





## Personal Witness

In my mid-thirties I knew without a doubt that Jesus was calling me to the priesthood. I have described it many times as a discovery of my true self. My calling was more of a revelation to me. The words that I heard in my heart were, "You are a priest." From that moment of enlightenment until I first entered the seminary at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein Illinois seven years passed.

I was a Certified Public Accountant and a partner in a regional firm that I had helped to build as one of the original owners. I had invested a good part of my life in this practice, fifteen years and thousands of hours. As the world would judge, I was successful. I had achieved the goal that I had set out to attain after college. I was deeply entrenched in the practice with numerous close working relationships with colleagues and clients. These were relationships built on years of mutual respect and trust. I did not want to break or even know how to break those ties.

At first, I tried to ignore the calling, ignore God. That wasn't working. My head was in one place and my heart was in another. It proved to be the most difficult time of my life. In the depth of my soul, I had this incredible longing to serve the Lord. His enduring love for me was overwhelming. Day by day my love for the Lord grew deeper and deeper. It was the power of love that gently moved me into action.

In His great love God gave me the faith to endure the days that followed. I began the process of discerning the various paths to priesthood and I jumped through the many hoops along the way. Without a clear path before me I began to communicate my intentions and explore different options to divest my practice, business holdings, and real estate including my home of 15 years. The losses were painful as I continued to let go of things one at a time. The most difficult loss was leaving my home and selling, giving away and storing possessions. I had a recurring dream that I was a wandering homeless person and when I awoke, I realized that I was.

I was leaving everything behind without a clear path before me. It was a giant leap of faith. Even as the path to seminary and priesthood started to materialize, my future was still clouded with uncertainty. Seminary life was a journey of constant evaluation and scrutiny. From the first day we were reminded that many do not complete the program. Numerous conversations with faculty were predicated with the caveat "if you make it to ordination." The future seemed so uncertain.

Day by day the journey led me deeper in faith. As the weeks passed, I resorted to total surrender to the Lord. I was finally able to let go and place my life in God's hands. Like the poor widow I put all that I had, my life, into God's hands. It was the most freeing moment of my life. Lord, help me to return to that faith.

