



A memory that has stayed with me of one my earliest experiences of parish ministry came when I was a sophomore in our college seminary. During the summers we were given assignments in some local parishes to begin our pastoral training. I was assigned to do a parish census in a poor parish in the city of Hartford. Since we had taken our religious vows and were Redemptorists, we wore clerical shirts. It was the end of the day of my work, and I was knocked on the door and a man came out and welcomed me calling me *Father*. I explained I was not a priest but rather a seminarian. It was clear that his family had just sat down to eat, and I told him I would come back another time to take the parish information. He insisted that I sit down with his family and eat with them. It was clear the family did not have much, but I was so very humbled by their welcome and their generosity. This memory comes to me when I ponder the Gospel of the Widow's Mite.

Years later, now ordained, I was in the director of our seminary formation for our men who were preparing to take their final vows as Redemptorists and to take the final steps to ordination. Certainly, there were many qualities that were expected of a man preparing for vows and ordination: some of them I desired to see in the candidates were: prayerfulness, good character, intelligence, faithfulness, and the ability to get along with others. I often thought to myself the quality I thought that I most wished to see in the student was a spirit of generosity, of not counting the cost, of a willingness to go the extra mile. For me, the quality of generosity is a virtue is the underpinning of many other key spiritual qualities.

In our readings today, we are presented with two widows whose generosity is inspiring. Widows hold a special place in the scriptures. The Biblical times were quite patriarchal and women were seen as very much dependent on their husbands for all their needs. So, when a husband died, a widow was left without any resources and was often quite dependent to the point of poverty. Quite often the Biblical prophets challenge the community to care for widows. As we read this text, we might consider our widows anyone who is in need of care and compassion. In our first reading today, the prophet Elijah, during a time of famine, asks a poor widow for some food. Although she has very little flour, she responds generously to him. Ironically, the present King of the Jewish nation is not being generous and kind to his people and there is a great contrast between the widow and the selfish King. In today's Gospel, a poor widow gives her last two pennies in a donation to the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus points out that some of the religious are making generous donations to the Temple so they can be seen and praised. We would have been moved if the widow would have given one penny which would have been half of her money, but she gives both coins, all that she has.

Now, do not fear, I am not about to speak about money to you. Through my years here, I have been humbled by the great financial generosity of our parishioners. As I think about generosity, and given from what is very precious to me, I think about the use of time as a challenge to a spirit of generosity. Something that most of us deeply value and try to protect is our time; it is a limited resource, twenty four hours to a day. There are many demands on our time: work, the need for rest and sleep, caring for our home or apartment, doctor's visits, going to school, attending church, family occasions, recreation, exercise, reading or watching television. When someone asks me can you do me a favor, I want to say yes immediately, but there is an inner nervousness about what is about to be asked: does he need a ride to the airport, do they want me to try to fix something in their home, do they want me to go the doctor with them. Our first thought before we respond may leave us thinking: how much time will this take. Time is precious. Time is a great way to determine what is important to us. We give our time to what is absolutely necessary and to what we like to do. We spend our time in what we value.

So, if we value our relationship with our spouse, our children, our parents, our friends, how much of my time is devoted to these relationships? If we value our faith, how much time is given to my relationship with God? Does God get my prime time of the day or whatever I can squeeze in? People sometimes say to me Father, I want to give something back; God has been good to me. This is a beautiful thought and it can move us to want to serve in some way in our community or parish. We all have a long list of things we have to do. They are essential. However, as I look over my use of time, I can ask how generous I am in its use. Am I ready at times to let go of both pennies or am I clutching the coins firmly in my hand. I have found it is often far easier to give money to a person in need rather than the precious gift of time. I often say that I can get pretty busy, but is rare, perhaps too rare, when I do find the time to eat. However, busy I may, there is some time for the Jets to be watched, although I am beginning to list that as a time of penance. No doubt all of us have a need for some private time when we can just be alone. Still, I think perhaps that the greatest challenge to our virtue of generosity is that we can become a bit selfish with our time.

As I thought about these two widows of our readings who are great witnesses to generosity, I could not help but think of our presence here at Mass today and the continual and ever present generosity of God who has given us life, who loves and nurtures us, and continues to feed us with his body and blood.