

OFFERING OUR WHOLE SELVES TO GOD

Nicky Ing - 9th November 2003

1 Kings 17:8-16; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9: 24-28; Mark 12: 38-44.

What a privilege it is to be here amongst all these beautiful floral arrangements, which reflect so deeply on our faith....

Both of the widows in today's readings teach us something about the meaning of sacrifice.....The widow of Zarephath feeds the prophet Elijah with a meal made with the last scrapings of flour from her jar and the very last drop of oil...we can picture her, perhaps...a victim of the long drought which had crippled Israel at that time, and had affected nearby Phoenicia as well...she was probably close to starvation, gathering sticks to make a fire and cook the last morsel of food for herself and her son.....and now, a man, what is more, a stranger, comes and says to her: 'Share your food with me, and God will repay you'.....What faith she has, to be willing to do this! At what cost! But she is willing to take the risk, and offers all that she has... God's promise is fulfilled, and they receive a miraculous supply of food for the remainder of the drought...this is a prophetic miracle story, its main point being to illustrate God's provision and faithfulness to the prophet Elijah and to the widow, in a moment of extreme need. The widow's charitable motive in giving from the little she had is in fact a secondary feature of the story....it is more about her obedience to God's word as it comes to her from the prophet, and the abundance of the blessing that follows. {Joyce Rupp..*Fresh Bread* p.145)

Widows and the poor have always been a special part of the Church in its witness. Did you notice how Psalm 146, which we read just now, tells how God will champion the cause of those who are faithful....especially those who have no access to human resources...the prisoners, the oppressed, the aliens, those excluded from society, the widows, and orphans. It has always been part of human nature to exclude, and to exploit those who are powerless...Jesus refers to this in the Gospel reading...there were Pharisees and Scribes who took cruel advantage of the widows left without husband or father to protect them. They managed to convince many of these vulnerable women to support them, and when one woman's finances ran out, they would move on to the next. The scribes in the Gospel story represent the hard of heart, who used their position to hold onto everything they could get their hands on....power and prestige was all-important to them. The widow who comes to the treasury in this story is not only economically poor, but in the eyes of the society of that time, she has no legal, religious, or political protection. But she gives all that she has...just two small coins...called 'leptons', probably only about the size and the value of a one cent piece...she could have kept one back, but she gives both. It seems so insignificant...so meaningless....but to Jesus, who was watching, it meant more than all that the wealthy gave, because it was everything she had...a gift from the heart. This woman is not ashamed to give her little bit to God. She has a dignity, hasn't she, a kind of moral courage, to stand up and let the world see it, especially in a society where wealth is considered a sign of God's favour, and poverty as a sign of God's displeasure. The meaning of the story of the **widow's mite**, as it has become known, is about true giving **from the heart**. It isn't about repaying a debt to God or the Church! It isn't about 'being good'....it isn't about making a gesture because we

feel guilty about having too much in a world where most people have too little. Jesus says of her: 'This woman gave the most, and what she gave was the willingness to give a little'.

An American writer called Patricia de Jong, describes generosity in this way: She says:

'Generosity is an artesian eruption from the depth of a thankful spirit, the well spring of the joy of living. We are most generous when we can't help ourselves. We give because we understand that our life is given to us with no strings attached. It is not a loan, a debt to repay by being good Christians. The ultimate meaning of generosity is the sharing of the goodness of the life God has given us. Generosity springs from gratitude, from our willingness to be thankful for all we have been given.'

So, how does this relate to us, today? you may be asking...

I believe there are a significant number of people amongst us who don't easily offer ourselves as we might or as we could, partly because we believe that what we have to offer just isn't good enough. I'm **not** talking about money here, we had Thanksgiving Sunday two weeks ago, and as Nic said then, we give thanks to God all the year round for the many blessings we receive, not just once a year!!! No, I am talking about our response to God's love.... our offering of our **whole selves** to God. We might want to say: 'I can't talk to anybody about my faith.....because I'm not that good a Christian'....Or: 'I can't invite anybody to come to Church because they might ask me questions I can't answer and then they will know how little I know!' Or...'I can't speak out on moral issues, because there are things in my own past that I feel embarrassed about'.....' I can't offer to help with children's ministry, because there are sure to be other people who can do it better than I can'.....it's as if we are saying: "All I have got is just two little coins...they won't count'...I believe we need to believe in ourselves a lot more, and be willing to take risks for God....

You see, it is really about trust, about offering ourselves, all that we are, all that we have, our strengths and our weaknesses, in response to God's amazing love....and trusting that God will enable us to do the work to which he calls us....but it does involve willingness to take risks, like those two widows did in the stories today...we will never be willing to give of ourselves or our resources generously, until we can fully trust God. Which brings us to the verse in the Hebrews passage, which was sandwiched between the old Testament and the Gospel...perhaps the most important reminder from the Scriptures this morning....that: **Hebrews 9:vv 26,27,28**.....Jesus gave his **all for us**...what amazing divine love is that...and what is my response, and yours, to the risen Jesus today? Can I dare to offer myself, in faith...however small that offering of my gifts may seem to me, however insignificant....As we come to receive the Holy Eucharist together, this morning, and give thanks for the abundant blessings in our lives, let us ask Him to open our eyes to recognise Him, and our hearts to respond in our own various ways...may we be enabled to take new risks and be open to new opportunities in serving him, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we experience the gift of his loving presence today and always. **Amen.**