

Today's readings are often used as an opportunity to preach about tithing, about putting money in the offertory basket. Now, don't get me wrong, tithing is a good thing and we should definitely do it. But you can exhale and rest easy. I'm not going to preach about that. Instead, I want to talk about generosity that is fueled by a trust in God.

Today, we hear two stories about women that have a lot in common. They're both widows that were generous because they put their complete trust in God. We don't know their names or what happened to them. But we do remember what they did.

In order for us to fully grasp the gravity of their actions, it helps for us to understand what it meant to be a widow in the Jewish culture of their times. When a woman's husband died, she had to be taken care of by the next male kin of her deceased husband, or sent back to her father. They were outcasts, a societal problem to be solved. In most cases, they had to rely on the charity of strangers. In that time, a woman without a man had to struggle to survive.

And that's the condition we find our widow from our first reading in. She was in a desperate situation. She had hit rock bottom. She was gathering sticks to build a fire to make a last meal for herself and her son. They would eat it and die. It was the seventh year of a deadly drought and she had accepted their untimely demise. There was no rain, no food, no hope.

Then along comes Elijah, a man from another country, a stranger. She didn't know who he was. She didn't have Facebook or Twitter. She had no clue that he was a great prophet. It's obvious that she's fighting to just stay alive but he has the nerve to approach her and ask for water and a bit of bread.

Elijah replies to her objection to his request with words that we hear spoken by Jesus often in the Bible. Elijah says, "Do not be afraid." That's an awful odd thing to say to a stranger

that has resigned herself and her son to die of starvation. But only someone who places their complete trust in God can show the generosity she does by doing exactly what he requested. She trusted that God would provide for the needs of her and her son. And that trust was rewarded with a jar of flour and a jug of oil that didn't go empty for an entire year.

Now fast forward about 900 years and we hear of the second widow outside the temple at the treasury. She puts in two small coins worth only a few cents. It's a pretty meager contribution but it's all she has. Jesus recognizes her generosity and points out that she contributed her whole livelihood. Chances are, she had no idea where more would come from. After all, she had to rely on the kindness of strangers to even make it through the day. She put her well-being into the hands of God. She placed her complete trust in Him.

But what does trusting in God even mean? Does it mean that we don't plan for the future? Does it mean that we give away everything we own to live the life of a hermit? Does it mean that we just make blind leaps of faith? Absolutely not. Trusting in God means that we shouldn't worry unnecessarily about a future that is ultimately out of our control. Trusting in God means heeding Elijah's words, "Do not be afraid." Trusting in God means making God's will the number one priority in our lives, especially when we can't see how it's all going to work out.

It's fitting that these particular readings came up today as we end Vocations Week. On Tuesday, I went to speak to the kids in our school about vocations. I told them that there are many different types of vocations – to the priesthood, to the religious life, to the diaconate, to the married life, or to the single life. God has different plans for all of us. He has a unique calling for each and every one of us that is designed just for us. There are no two callings that are exactly alike. Our task is to stop talking long enough so that we can hear His voice because at the heart

of every vocation is trusting in God and saying to Jesus, “Lord, you are my good shepherd, and I will follow wherever you lead.”

We like to think that we place our trust in God. It’s even on our money. “In God We Trust” appears on every piece of American currency. Seems to be a hollow statement though if you look at our society. Because of our fallen human nature, we have a tendency to follow the example of the scribes in today’s Gospel instead of the widows. We trust not in God’s providence but rather in our own ability to do for ourselves. We work very hard to meet the expectations of others instead of God’s. We place our confidence in our consumer society’s empty promises instead of Jesus’ eternal promises. It would probably be more accurate if we had the mint replace “In God We Trust” with “In Wealth We Trust” or “In Celebrity We Trust” or “In Power We Trust” or “In Popular Opinion We Trust.”

The widows in our readings recognized their dependence on God and trusted in His plan for their lives. As a result, they were able to be generous, even with what little they possessed. They offered to God not just their stuff, but their hearts. And that’s what God wants from us. He wants us to purify our hearts of the self-centered attitudes that make us more like the scribes than the widows. But this is not something we can do on our own, nor is it something that usually happens overnight.

Brothers and sisters, we have to ask for God to help us. His grace is our secret weapon, and too often we keep it on the shelf simply because we don’t ask for His help. I came across a short prayer composed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola that is particularly helpful for us to grow in heart-felt generosity and to strengthen our trust in God. Please pray it along with me.

*Dear Lord, please teach me to be generous; teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not count the cost; to fight and not heed the wounds; to toil and not seek for rest; to labor and not ask for any reward – save that of knowing that I do Your will. Amen.*

As we continue Mass, let's live this prayer from our hearts and exercise our trust in God's goodness and power. Above all, let's be less like the scribes and more like the widows as we offer our lives to God in thanksgiving for all He has given us.