

32nd Ordinary Sunday
November 11, 2018
“Why Do We Give?”

1 Kgs 17:10-16
Heb 9:24-28
Mk 12:41-44

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

The next 6 weeks will be a busy time for most Americans. Besides all the special holiday celebrations, many will be thinking about the tax season which follows. They will be considering what contributions they might make in order to gain deductions on their Federal and State Income Tax Forms.

I wonder how many of our 501c3 organizations and other charities would truly benefit if the tax deductions were taken away? I wonder how many of us are generous because we hope to gain something in return?

Certainly, the rich and powerful can benefit when they contribute to people or causes they support. They often gain more power as well as influence. We, ourselves, look with favor upon those who help us when we are in need – or bless us with a gift that was unexpected. Gratitude is something that most people feel when they are favored in any way!

However, how do our contributions and gift-giving measure up in God’s eyes? What are the true motivations behind what we do for charity? What does God expect from our hearts when we give a gift? And is our charity really directed to Godly causes and not to gain recognition or esteem from those we hope to impress or, perhaps, influence? The Book of Kings and the Gospel selections for today have much to say in this regard!

Elijah was close to death from dehydration and starvation. Previously, he had prophesied a drought as punishment for the Chosen People. They had succumbed to the pagan worship of Baal. Baal was the god of fertility and storms. Human sacrifice, temple prostitution, and fertility rites were part of his worship. Because he had angered the king, Elijah had fled into the wilderness all the way to the outskirts of Zarephath and, now, was about to die.

However, the widow and her son were not much better off. They only had food enough for one last small meal. Moreover, Elijah was asking for help from a pagan woman in a town that was a stronghold for Baal!

Nevertheless, the woman helped Elijah. Was it because of what he promised? Was it out of desperation and hope? Was it because she truly had compassion for someone who was on the point of death? Perhaps, we will never know. What we do know is that she risked everything she had to help another human being who was in dire need. And God blessed her and her son for her compassion and generosity!

In the Gospel, we find faithful Hebrews contributing to the Temple and its upkeep. For some reason, they had to make those contributions in a public way. Perhaps, the priests and levites had orchestrated this – and for the wrong reasons. Perhaps, this was done to draw attention to the generous and to shame the miserly.

In any event, Jesus calls attention to the poor widow. She was the one who was truly generous! She gave away her only hope for survival – all she had! Whereas, all the others had contributed from their surplus and didn't have to suffer one bit!

Brothers and Sisters, these two stories should make us pause and reflect! How generous are we, really, with what God has given us? How well do we use the gifts, blessings, and talents we have received? Do we remember that everything we possess comes from God? Do we pray before we make contributions to whatever person or cause? Are we really responding to a grace, or are we serving ourselves in some way, however subtle? How much are we really holding back?

As I have said in the past, God will always ask for more than what we are prepared to give. He will ask for more than we think we are able to give. He will surprise us by asking for what we think we don't even have or possess. And some of what God asks will come out of the blue – without warning or our preparation. But, believe me when I say that our failure to respond might haunt us until the day we die!

So, let us pray, today, for the grace, the courage, and the kindness to respond to whatever God continues to ask of us.

Amen.

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Msgr. Russell G. Terra