

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
1Kings 17:10-16; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

As we hear about the widow's mite next Sunday, we will likely hear from the homilist about sacrificial giving. This has often been related to our stewardship of treasure. The reading in 1Kings also tells of a widow who prepared for the prophet Elijah a bit of bread made from her last bit of flour and oil. Both women are praised for their generosity in the face of their need. Let's take a closer look.

The widow to whom Elijah was sent was not a believer. She was not a woman who shared a faith in the God of Elijah. The reading tells us that she was a Canaanite widow. She belonged to a culture that believed in many gods, the greatest of whom was Baal who was the god of the storm, springs and water. Canaan was experiencing a drought and famine which Elijah had foretold would fall upon King Ahab's country if he did not return to the righteous worship of the one true God. For the Canaanites, drought and famine were indications that Baal had died and there was a need for him to be brought back to life by magic rites. They believed that the gods could be helped to bring about fertility of the soil if the people fertilized one another in the places of worship. This belief led to a system of sanctuary prostitution. These efforts to bring life were to cause Baal to come to life again.

This is the widow whom Elijah approaches asking for her last bit of food. "Do not be afraid," he says. "My God says the jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Holy One sends rain upon the earth." What we must remember here is that she has no faith in Elijah's God. She has not got a clue who his God is! Not only is her larder nearly empty, her storehouse of faith is also empty. This is further confirmed if we read on to the next section where her son has died and she makes it very clear that she blames

herself for the choices she has made. She must have imagined that Baal was furious with her for housing one of Yahweh's prophets! It is not until Elijah restores her son to life that she exclaims, "Now I know that the word of God comes from your mouth." Until this time she was taking a risk, not acting through faith.

I believe that 's what our readings are about for Sunday. Taking a risk on God and on what we know about God and on what we believe God wants from us when there is not one good reason on earth to do so. We take a chance. When you have no patience left for an "irregular person" in your life but extend yourself to that person hiding impatience, you then give the widow's mite. When you are sick to death of picking up "things" after a family member and choose instead to pick up those dirty socks one more time, you give the widow's mite. When that elderly and lonely neighbor calls you again at supper time with the same complaints you have heard a hundred times and still you listen with your heart, you give the widow's mite.

This lesson is not about money alone. It is about trusting, as Paul says in the New Testament, that God's power is made perfect in our weakness. Giving from the heart is purest when the storehouse is empty.