

Father O'Connor's Homily for 7 November 2021  
Thirty-second Ordinary Sunday – B

1 Kings 17: 10-16

Hebrews 9: 24-28

Mark 12: 38-44

*In the mail this past week I hope that you received information about our diocesan “Heart of a Shepherd Campaign” that is now taking place in Saint Joseph Parish and in Nativity Parish. If you did not receive this information, please let us know in the parish office.*

*A question that I would like to place before you today is: “Why should I contribute to this campaign?” I will tell you why I have made two three-year pledges, one for Saint Joseph Parish and one for Nativity Parish – since I am the pastor of two parishes and I want each of my parishes to benefit.*

*“Why should I contribute to this ‘Heart of a Shepherd Campaign’?” What it comes down to is this: 1) We need more priests. This is very apparent with the growing new-normal of two parishes sharing one priest, as we are. It is important that we support our two seminaries so that the number of our seminarians may continue to grow. Borromeo Seminary College and Saint Mary Seminary are where our priests come from here in our Diocese. If we want more priests in the future, we need to take care of our seminaries and our seminarians today.*

*2) We need to take care of the priests that we already have: our retired priests who depend upon our Priest Pension Fund, now that they are no longer receiving a paycheck. And our newly-ordained priests who are carrying college debts.*

*3) We also need to take care of Saint Joseph Parish and Nativity Parish. This campaign enables us to do so. Sixty-five cents of every dollar each parish raises during this “Heart of a Shepherd Campaign” will return to that parish as each pledge is fulfilled. And this will help each parish to pay for its new church roof.*

*On our parishes' website homepage, there are some short videos that you can watch: one that I did, one that our seminarian Nathan Frankart did, and one that our Diocese did about this “Heart of a Shepherd Campaign.” Please take a look at them and learn more about this campaign opportunity.*

*And please talk about this campaign at home, and pray about the decision that you are able to make. We will have a Commitment Sunday for our two parishes on the weekend of 20-21 November. But if have made your decision*

*before then, your “Heart of a Shepherd” commitment card is welcome ahead of time. Thank you very much!*

Corrie ten Boom [1892-1983] was a member of a Christian family in the Netherlands. When the Nazis invaded in 1940 and began deporting Jewish citizens to concentration camps, Corrie and her family made a costly decision: to save as many Jewish citizens as possible. Corrie and her family were eventually reported and they were sent to concentration camps as well.

After Corrie’s release at the end of the war, she returned to the Netherlands and opened a rehabilitation center for other victims of concentration camps. One of Corrie’s more famous quotes is: “Never be afraid to entrust an unknown future to a known God.”

One day Jesus saw a group of wealthy people who were making a big show of their contributions at the Temple. They used large coins so that when they fell into the collection box an impressive clanging sound could be heard by everyone.

Their manner was so different from the poor widow quietly presenting her gift to God. This widow only had two tiny coins to her name, an offering with a value of only a few cents

Probably no one else in the crowd noticed her. But Jesus did. He called His disciples together and said to them, “This poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth. But she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.” And Jesus praised her.

Let us look carefully at this widow’s actions. There are some underlying things we might easily miss. She clearly was “not afraid to entrust an unknown future to a known God.”

First of all, her act of devotion might indicate that she had forgiven God. Why would I suggest this? She had lost her husband and now was a widow. Some of you have experienced the death of someone very close to you and you know not only the hurt and loneliness this loss may bring, but also the temptation to become bitter and angry.

Many of you are familiar with the work of the psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. In 1969 she gave us her groundbreaking book, *On Death and Dying*.

The five stages of grief, which Dr. Kübler-Ross described, are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Let us look at that second stage, anger. It is not unusual for a person who has lost someone they dearly love to be angry with the one who has died. “How could you leave me in this situation?”

The grieving person might also be angry with themselves. “Oh, if I had just done things differently maybe they would still be around.”

And they may even be angry with God. “If God can do anything, why didn’t He spare my loved one?”

Even though we believe that God has prepared a far better place for our loved one with Him in heaven, it is still difficult to let go. That is the price of loving.

There is a story about a man who was walking down the street when he saw a young boy in a tree, out on a limb. The boy had a leaf in his hand and some string, and he was trying to tie that leaf back on a branch. The man asked the young fellow what he was doing.

The boy replied that his sister was very ill. The doctor had told his family that “before the last leaf falls from the tree in the front yard, she will be gone.”

The boy was tying the leaves back on the tree, as if that could spare his sister’s life.

No doubt it is difficult to deal with losing someone we love. One of the obstacles to healing may be our anger toward God.

The first thing that this widow may have been saying as she dropped her two coins into the temple treasury was: “I have come to grips with my grief. I am over my anger. I am now at peace with you, God.”

The second thing that widow may have been saying as she dropped in those two coins was: “I trust you, God.” There was no Social Security, no pension, no monthly investment check that she would be receiving now that her husband was gone. Unless he had been a wealthy man or unless she had children and other family members to support her, she was at the mercy of a sometimes heartless society.

Jesus pointed to her poverty when He said that those two coins were all that she had. She must have done this trusting that God would provide for her daily bread.

This widow had forgiven God and she trusted God.

Here is the third thing her offering may have said that day: “I believe in the work of God.” The work of the temple was important to her and she wanted to support it. She wanted to be part of something bigger than herself.

Here is a story. A woman had lost her husband and she was having trouble moving through the stages of grief. She went to the cemetery every day to put flowers on his grave. She simply could not let go. In her despair, she went to her doctor for a check-up. When she told him what she was doing, her doctor made a gentle suggestion.

He said, "Instead of taking flowers to the cemetery, let me suggest that you take them to the hospital. I have two patients there who are alone. They would really enjoy receiving some flowers. Tomorrow, why not take those flowers to the hospital rather than to the cemetery? You could visit with them and maybe offer them some encouragement."

The woman followed the doctor's suggestion. She began taking flowers to the hospital rather than to the cemetery. And little by little she was able to work through her grief.

Those two small coins, dropped in the temple treasury that day, may have been an important part of this widow's recovery from her grief. She had been victorious over her anger at God. She trusted God for her daily bread, and she was involved in the ongoing work of God in this world. In fact, in God's eyes this poor widow gave Him more from her heart than any sizeable check from a corporate giant could ever match.

What was her secret that she passes on to us? Corrie ten Boom summed it up well: "Never be afraid to entrust an unknown future to a known God."

Great advice.