

Father O'Connor's Homily for 10 November 2024  
Thirty-second Ordinary Sunday – B

1 Kings 17: 10-16

Hebrews 9: 24-28

Mark 12: 38-44

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 courageous decision: to hide and save as many Jewish citizens as possible. Corrie and her family were eventually arrested 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 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 to the Temple. They used large, heavy coins so that when they fell into the collection container a loud clanging sound could be heard by everyone.

Their manner was so different from that of the poor widow who quietly presented her gift to God. She only had two tiny, thin coins to her name, an offering with a value of just a few cents

Probably no one in the crowd noticed her. Except for Jesus. 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 so Jesus praised her.

Let us look carefully at this widow's actions. There are some underlying assumptions that we might easily miss. And clearly, this widow 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 she was a widow. Some of you have experienced the death of someone very close to you. And you know not only the pain and loneliness this loss may bring, but also the temptation to become bitter and angry about it.

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 describes, 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 here.”

And they may even be angry with God. “If God really is all-powerful, why didn’t He do something to save my loved one?”

Even though we believe that God has prepared a far better place for our loved ones with Him in heaven, it can still be very difficult for us to let go. This is the price of loving: that one day we will have to say good-bye. And why some people are afraid to love.

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 scotch tape, and he was taping that leaf back on to the 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 desperately taping the leaves back on the tree, as if that could spare his sister’s life.

It is very difficult to lose someone that we love. We may have tried desperately to hold on to them. One of the obstacles to our healing today may be our anger with God.

And so 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 anger. And I have forgiven you, God. Now I am once again at peace with you, Lord.”

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 dividend 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 an often-heartless society.

Jesus pointed to her poverty when He said that those two coins were all that she had to live on. Not holding on to one coin for herself, she contributed both of them, 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 in the Temple might 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 another 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, the doctor made a gentle suggestion.

He said, “You know, I have two patients in the hospital right now who are all alone. Tomorrow, why not take flowers to the hospital rather than to the cemetery? You could visit with them and maybe offer them a little bit of encouragement.”

The woman followed her doctor’s suggestion. She began taking flowers to the hospital regularly rather than to the cemetery. And, caring for others, little by little she was able to work through her grief as well.

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. 1) She had gotten through her anger and had forgiven God. 2) She trusted God for her daily bread. 3) And she got involved in the ongoing work of God in this world.

And, as Jesus pointed out, in God’s eyes this poor widow had given far 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... for us all. And at all the stages in our lives.