

Missionary Commentary

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 10, 2024

Sunday Readings

1 Kings 17:10-16
Psalm 146:7-10
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

The Poor: Gospel Perspectives and Challenges

In Mark's Gospel today we find the story of the poor widow who contributed her two small coins to the temple treasury. Jesus pointed out to his disciples that her "widow's mite" had great value because it was a sincere contribution, coming from her heart, while others only made contributions from their surplus wealth.

In various Gospel passages Jesus warns his disciples against the real dangers of riches (Mt 6:19-21; Lk 8:14); he also invites those who wish to follow him more closely to embrace a simple life-style (Mt 19:21; Lk 12:33). Jesus' words are often very direct: "Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth can destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be" (Lk 12:33-34).

Jesus requires that both justice and mercy be practiced; the rich have an urgent duty to assist the poor. In fact, one's eternal happiness is conditioned on how one concretely treats one's poor neighbors: "When you have a meal, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot repay you means that you are fortunate, because payment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again" (Lk 14:13-14).

Furthermore, our service of the poor is a concrete expression of our love for Jesus, since He is truly the one we are helping when we serve the needy. This is explicitly expressed in the narrative of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46); Jesus says that whenever we serve the hungry, thirsty, naked or the stranger and prisoner, we are assisting the Lord himself. "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brethren of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

In Jesus' perspective, one is blessed if, even in the face of personal need, one still looks to the needs of others. "Poverty" is not limited to only material needs; there is the poverty of being lonely, abandoned, unwanted, rejected by society. Even an ordinary poor person can show neighborly love, compassion, and human tenderness. Jesus declares those "blessed" in God's kingdom whose lot is actual poverty caused by circumstances or persecution—if they remain generous even in their need.

Saint Paul in his beautiful Christological Hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 speaks about the kenosis, the "self-emptying" of Jesus' divinity through the Incarnation. In voluntarily serving the poor in our midst, we need to adopt the same "self-emptying attitude" of Jesus; we need to take on the "mind of Christ." Paul writes: "Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty" (2 Cor 8:9).

Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lankan Jesuit, asserts that for the Christian *voluntary poverty* is a truly credible response to *forced poverty*. In other words, whoever legitimately has

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material goods in this life must freely and willingly (voluntarily) share them with those poor who live in *forced poverty*, caused by social-economic inequality, injustice, or even by natural calamities. Voluntary poverty is a clear sign of a contemporary Christian.

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

1 Kings 17:10-16 — The Old Testament helps us to see how God prepared for the coming of His Son, Jesus. Today's narrative shows that the prophet Elijah goes to the small town of Zarephath and had enough to survive—even in the time of great drought.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 146:7-10 — This psalm expresses in concrete language how the Lord provides for the hungry, oppressed, captives, blind, widows, and others; to God's generosity, we readily respond: Praise the Lord, my soul!

Second Reading

Hebrews 9:24-28 — The letter to the Hebrews recalls how once a year on the Day of Atonement the Jewish High Priest entered the sanctuary of the Temple and sprinkled the blood of animals; this ritual is here compared with the sacrificial actions of Christ, our high priest.

Gospel

Mark 12:38-44 — Today's Gospel tells us *how not* to live a religious life and *how* to live it. We should *not* follow the example of the self-serving scribes; we *should* imitate the generous spirit of the poor widow. Like her we should give from both our surplus and from our need.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, author of the recent books

[Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language](#) (Orbis Books – 2023) and [Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights](#), commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II [1965-2025] (Faith Alive Books – 2024)

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for a collaborative discussion between USCMA and Code Equity about expanding their free classes and training for vulnerable youth and young adults domestically and internationally

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