

32nd Sunday Ordinary Time

November 7-8, 2015

Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

If I asked each of you to name a hero in your life, I suspect that it would not be too difficult for you to do so. Heroes can be mentors, teachers, coaches, our parents or older siblings. They could be hosts of people, or perhaps we consider as heroes, people whom we have never even met. We may count a professional athlete, musician, maybe even a Pope- who knows? But in all cases, they are people to whom we look for inspiration. We want to be like them.

Yet, no matter how many times we hear a Gospel like today's, one in which Jesus compared the poor widow to the scribes, the message does not seem to get through very well. These men were respected, held positions of high authority, and yet in today's Gospel, they are not the heroes at all. It is the poor widow who takes center stage. How many desire to be like her? How many of us would really and truly look up to her?

Matters are only made worse if our own heroes let us down. The beginning of the gospel spoke of how the scribes devoured the savings of widows, how they took advantage of the people in the congregation, preyed on their gullibility for their own wealth and profit. As official interpreters of the Law as contained in the first five books of the Scriptures, in effect they were the ancient version of lawyers and judges. They had to interpret the law and apply it.

Oftentimes these men served as trustee's of a widow's estate, and a common way of collecting their fee was to acquire a share of the estate. Jesus knew that some of them frequented the synagogue as a way of getting publicity, of appearing to be pious, when in reality they were more likely drumming up some business. This is why the

Lord says that they will receive a stiff sentence at the final judgment, the highest court of them all.

In our society, heroes command a tremendous amount of respect. At times, we put very unfair expectations on their personal lives because of particular gifts they have in some areas of life not necessarily related to personal character. I am not suggesting that we stop looking to famous people as heroes all together- not at all. We need figures of inspiration. But I do suggest that we recover a venerable tradition in our Church of paying more attention to the saints- real people, real lives, single, married, clerical or religious- there is something for everyone.

A generation of Baby Boomers recalls hearing in your youth about young saints such as St. Maria Goretti, St. John Berchmans or Saint Agnes, all young teenage saints. Did you not marvel at the simple life of St. Francis of Assisi, his frail demeanor and robe and cincture conveying such radical authenticity? How many stood in awe of the courage of a married man by the name of Thomas More for his witness to the sanctity of marriage? These are but a few examples.

And yet, almost without exception, these people did not leave very much behind that would point to their greatness. Yes, Francis drew several thousand to his way of life while alive, much like Mother Teresa many centuries later, but the others were pretty insignificant in at the time. Their greatness came only later, when people could look back at their lives and see in them a worthy example.

It is right and good that we try to accomplish many tasks in life, but people speak so often of legacy. What legacy do you wish to leave behind?

We can rest assured that Jesus is looking at us quite differently, not asking what “legacy” we left behind. Rather, Jesus is asking us how much love we put into our doing. The real hero today is the poor widow, who gave everything to follow Jesus. How will we feel when, if we are blessed to get to heaven, we see people like her in the place of honor nearest to Jesus?

If we can speak of a legacy, I believe that legacy is to be found in the lives of the people whom we love, whom you helped to raise, or whose lives you touched in a positive way by means of your own life of virtue. That is your legacy. Today’s Gospel reminds us that the set of standards by which our lives ought to be evaluated is quite different from that of the world’s. And, not only ought we not to fear this- it is actually quite freeing.