

## **THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: November 10, 2024**

I wonder if any of you have heard of Gustavo Gutierrez? He was a priest in Peru, a member of the Dominican Order. He is remembered as the Father of Liberation Theology. He died on October 22nd, just a few weeks ago. Pope John Paul II, as well as Benedict XVI, warned him about messing in Marxist theories of economy. Pope Francis respected him, understanding him as a fellow Latin American. I believe Brother Daniel took a class with him at Boson College. I went to one of his lectures there. One of his maxims was that the church must stand for the preferential option for the poor. This saying entered into the social justice teachings of the Church even before Pope Francis.

Other teachings of Gutierrez are these. "The Denunciation of injustice implies the rejection of the use of Christianity to legitimize the established order." He also taught, "Christian faith is a historical faith. God is revealed in Jesus Christ and, through him, in human history, and in the least important and poorest sector of those who make it up. Only with this as a starting point is it possible to believe in God."

Today's scripture readings from the Book of Kings and the Gospel of Mark exemplify these beliefs found in the Bible. Compassion for widows runs through the Bible and the early Church. In Biblical times women had no intrinsic rights. They depended on their husbands or on their grown sons. Without a man, they could live in abject poverty. The early church was very focused on the care of widows and children. Saint Paul's final return to Jerusalem saw him bringing money collected from his travels to be used for the care of the poor in the city and church of Jerusalem.

In the book of Kings we read that God has directed the prophet Elijah to go to the gentile widow of Zarephath during a time of drought. This widow is remarkable and has deep faith that God indeed has sent Elijah. She gives the prophet the last of any food she has for herself and her son, a handful of flour and drops of oil. The action she is being called to will take great faith on her part.

The poor widow in the gospel story is not given a name or is anything of her life's story shared with us. Jesus simply praises her as she places two small copper coins in the temple treasury. Jesus says that "she out of her poverty has donated everything she had, all she had to live on."

The early disciples of Jesus took this seriously. One Bishop preached that the superfluities of the rich are the necessities of the poor. To give of one's surplus is not charity but justice. I have been touched by the story of the Irish farmer in the famine of the mid-nineteenth century. He cried because he had nothing to give to a beggar as this was a loss of being able to practice hospitality.

We live in a country of incredible wealth, much of this wealth applied to weapons of destruction and to many unnecessary luxuries. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Income inequality increases. The middle classes shrink into the poorer class. This is the direction of much of the world. Pope Francis has accented the place of the people on the peripheries as the heart of the church. He has chosen cardinals from small, insignificant countries as the advisors of the church. He has upheld the duty to care for the poor, for the migrants teeming over the globe, to those being squeezed out of their native lands, to those who live in countries being destroyed by war. He has made a definite preferential option for the poor.

I ponder on what all this means for us a church community. I am the poor widow with little resources but have no excuse for not reaching out, speaking out, using whatever small talents I have to share with others in any need. I am the prophet Elijah, ready and open to listen to God's Word that may direct me to be of some help in those widows in need. And I am Jesus ready to confront the scribes who devour widows' houses. The times call for greater heed to my discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's Word and Jesus' teachings are more significant to me than the capitalists, the corporate leaders, the Republicans and Democrats and what they can teach us.

I find poets today help me better understand God's Word. Here is a short poem written by Fernando Pessoa which I found in a collection of Mark Burrows:

To be great, be whole: don't exaggerate  
Or leave out any part of you.  
Be complete in each thing. Put all you are  
Into the least of your acts.

**Timothy J. Joyce, S.T.L., O.S.B.**