



The readings today bring out several important lessons for us:

First, when we do good, especially when we give alms, the Lord looks at our hearts. Here is this widow in the Gospel. She gives a most insignificant amount, two pennies, and yet her gift is full of generosity. The Lord sees into her heart and blesses her for her generosity.

So when we give to the poor, to the parish, to other charities, we should pray that God would give us a generous heart so that our gift will be a pure one, full of love. You see, it is possible for a rich person who gives away a lot still to have a stingy heart. For that matter, it's possible for a poor person to have a stingy heart. Whether we are rich or we are poor, or we are somewhere in between, God asks us to give with love, to give as an act of love. That's what Jesus teaches us. That's what this poor widow teaches us.

Second, God cannot be outdone in generosity. Here is the prophet Elijah. He's on the run. He has spoken God's Word to the king, and the king did not like it very much and is seeking to kill him. So Elijah, the servant of God, on a mission from God, comes to this widow and her son. There is a drought. There is no food. Elijah asks for the little food she has and what he is really asking is for her to give to God, to trust God in giving her last food to Elijah. So she offers her little bit of food and God provides generously in return, miraculously providing all the food that they need to survive. She is generous with God and God far outdoes her generosity. God cannot be outdone in generosity.

Now, this doesn't just refer to money here, although it would include that. It also includes all the many ways that we give of ourselves: our time, our love, our attention. As we pour ourselves out in love to other, God blesses us 100 times over.

This does not mean that somehow we are earning God's grace, rather our response of love to God and to others opens the way more fully for God to bless us. A stingy heart simply cannot receive the abundant blessing of God. A stingy heart has closed itself off. But, the more generous we are with God and with others, the more our hearts are opened to God's generosity to us.

One thing that all of us must always keep in mind is this generosity of heart and action to which we are all called always involves the Cross. Jesus asks us to make a total gift of ourselves and a

total gift of ourselves inevitably will involve pain: the pain of self denial, the pain of ridicule, the pain of loss, or whatever it might be. But love is a greater thing, a much greater thing, than pain. And as we grow in love, our willingness to suffer grows deeper. Not because we want to suffer, that's not the point, but rather because we want to love - and deeply, with all our being, with all that we have, just as Jesus said about the poor widow. She gave all that she had without counting the cost. Mother Teresa would express it for us like this: "I ask you one thing: do not tire of giving, but do not give your leftovers. Give until it hurts, until you feel the pain."

Take a moment in silence now and ask Jesus to help you to give yourself away in love to Him and to others, your whole self without counting the cost, without minding the pain. Then you will know true joy.

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend
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