

## Armistice Day Commemoration      Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018

**Gospel:**     Mark 12:38-44    Widow's mite

### **Reflection**

Today's readings both focus on the generosity of poor widows – one widow who feeds the prophet Elijah during a time of famine – even as she and her son face imminent starvation; the other a widow who is observed by Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, as she gives her *all* (two small coins) to the Temple treasury. Such beautiful, selfless generosity for God. What a 'saint'! Jesus applauds the widow's pure motive and willing heart rather than the amount of the gift: "Out of her poverty, she put in everything she had to live on"

We could - at this point - explore how these words of scripture encourage us in our financial giving to the Church, or motivate us to sacrificial acts of hospitality.

We could, reflecting on the sacrificial giving of the widows, consider the earthly journey of Jesus who became poor and gave His all – that we might become rich (as Paul wrote to the early Church in Corinth).

But actually, I feel somewhat uneasy about today's gospel story, and given the context of Mark chapter 12, I question this approach. Previously in the same chapter, when one of the scribes came to Jesus asking which was the first commandment, Jesus quoted the first commandment of the Mosaic Law and immediately followed it with '*And the second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these.* We then hear Jesus *denouncing* the Scribes. Listen again to this reading.....

Is it more likely that Jesus was angry at the injustices he saw lived out around him? A faithful and God-fearing widow going without her daily bread because of the greed and corruption of the Temple Treasury? Religious institution oppressing the poor?

We hear in today's psalm: 'Happy are those whose hope is in the lord their God...a God who executes justice for the oppressed...who gives food to the hungry.....The Lord

lifts up those who are bowed down....he upholds the orphan and the widow. *'This poor widow...she – out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on!'*

Yes – a faithful, selfless act of giving, but also societal injustice and institutional exploitation, not to mention the attitude and actions of the rich!

Here in 'Godz-own', we know that the gap between rich and poor continues to grow.

We know that loan sharks target the poor, and elder abuse is a growing reality. We read of immigrant-worker exploitation in our construction industry. We are not immune from the 'widow's mite' syndrome! *The Lord loves the righteous.....*

Yesterday, on the eve of our Armistice Commemorations, I travelled up to Auckland for a Study Day, arranged by the national Peace and Conflict Studies Centre, Christian Network, Pax Christi and the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. It was entitled:

***Truthful Remembrance leads to Enduring Peace.*** The main focus of the day was around the New Zealand Wars. The stories told, were powerful.

The story of Parihaka in Taranaki – of the 1600 soldiers who confronted a peaceful community of 3000 Maori men, women and children to confiscate land on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1881....of the non-violent resistance arranged by Christian missionary-influenced leaders Te Whiti O Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi (who were then incarcerated without trial), of 200 children singing, and women bearing freshly baked bread to give the approaching soldiers. The community gave their all in the face of shameful injustice: gardens, crops and whare were destroyed, men taken, women and children left without food.

Last year, when Crown representatives walked onto Parihaka to finally offer a formal apology, they were led in by young people – and then greeted by women – the descendents of the women who had been raped by the soldiers in 1881.....

We heard from a former Otorohonga College student yestersday, pakeha Leah Bell, who spent four years seeking a Statutory National Day of Commemoration for the New Zealand Wars. While politicians and officials claimed their need for a neutral stance

when approached by the then 14-yr-old Leah, it was her elderly grandfather and a group of teenage mothers who first signed her petition – a petition that eventually gathered 14,000 signatures, effecting change. The vulnerable gave out of their powerlessness and achieved justice. *The Lord sets the prisoners free, the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.....*

I appreciated reading an article in the most recent Christchurch Catholic Worker newspaper as I flew to Auckland yesterday. It was written by a clergy colleague, Rev'd. John McLister. John is chair of the Lyttelton Seafarers Centre Charitable Trust. His article, while sharing stories of seafarer exploitation and its exposure in New Zealand, also offered good news in sharing the ecumenical success of the Mission to Seafarers and the reestablishment of the Lyttelton Centre. The Centre provides a warm, welcoming space where seafarers have free access to WiFi so that they can make contact with their families. *The Lord executes justice for the oppressed, the Lord watches over the strangers....*

The divine lives in us all – the oppressed, the stranger, the widow. When we serve one another, loving our neighbour as ourselves, when we seek justice and love kindness, we serve the Christ who gave His all for us.

Today we commemorate the centenary of Armistice Day – when the disastrous blood bath of World War I which took 18,000 kiwi lives alone – was declared over. Services and silence will again honour the dead. A Roaring Chorus will seek to express something of the jubilation felt when *that* war was announced 'over'. Once again, the hope for lasting peace that filled hearts and minds one hundred years ago, and which continues to be longed for, worked towards and constantly prayed for around the world, will be expressed. Jesus said *'My peace I give you, my peace I leave you...'*

As we gather at Christ's table, no matter who we are or where we are, we receive that peace. We touch the mystery of God's universal and self-giving love for us. Pope John Paul II wrote:

*Even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation.*

And famous Jesuit paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin who saw all creation as holy, said the following after praying the Eucharist in the wilderness of Asia:

*'Since once again Lord, I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the real majesty of the Real itself. I will make the whole earth my altar and on it I will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world. I will place on my paten O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of my labour. Into my chalice I will pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth's fruits.'*

Today, may we humbly offer ourselves, united with all creation, in all its groaning and its beauty, carrying the hope that is in us, receiving the peace that Christ gifts us. And then, may we go out into the world ready to live justice, share hope and speak peace. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Amen.