

Sunday Homily

32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

7 NOVEMBER 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

"Rain on the face of the earth."

Illustration

It was a country road in Ireland fifty years ago. Sheep were being loaded into a lorry for market. In the glen an old woman stood at her farmhouse door, watching the operation. It was strange to her. She turned to her son and asked him what was happening. "They are loading sheep for market," he told her. "Well, I have seen everything now," the old woman replied. "It is no wonder that the young people will not walk a few miles to Mass on Sunday, when even the sheep are getting a lift into town!"

The old woman had walked everywhere during her long life. She walked her land to see to her cattle. She walked the road to Mass. She walked across bogland, eight miles to visit her relations by the sea. She was married for twenty years, and a widow for forty years. In that time she had struggled to bring up a family, in the days when Ireland was poor, and there was no social assistance to help. But she managed it.

She was a woman of great courage. Hardship and poverty had shaped her life. She was a strong character, and her voice was full of authority. Her family loved her – children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was, to them, a great example of goodness, kindness and faith in God. When she died, they said of her, "Nan – she was mighty!"

Gospel Teaching

Sitting beside the Temple treasury today, Jesus catches sight of a widow. At the time Jesus is indulging in a spot of "people-watching". It can be quite fascinating to see the variety of human beings passing by, and their differing styles. Religious officials in long robes make an impressive sight. People bow and make way for them. They are important people. Then the widow comes along. Nobody takes any notice of her. In fact, Jesus has to call the attention of his disciples to this nobody, dropping a few copper coins into the collection box. There is something he wants to say about this sight.

What Jesus says is quite startling. This woman has given more than anyone. It is a paradox. It is the very opposite of what appears to be happening. Jesus is telling us, "Look carefully at what is really going on here." Well-to-do people are giving very generous donations to keep the system of religion going. This poor woman is placing her entire trust in God, because she has no one else to rely on. It is not the same activity at all.

The widow is teaching us a lesson from life. What money she has is very little, but she knows that money alone will not save her, or bring her comfort. Her life is in God's hands. She knows this. The disposition of her heart is to be generous. She trusts that God will not fail her. She prays for God's kingdom to come. She prays for daily bread. She prays for the grace to live in peace with others, and to be delivered from all evil.

Application

One day when Jesus was preaching to the people, a woman in the crowd was so impressed with him that she shouted out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you!" It was an early shout of praise for Mary, the mother of Jesus: Mary, the young girl of Nazareth, who also became a widow. It was a tribute to her womanly heart, and her motherly guidance of this eloquent preacher from Galilee.

In response to this cry, Jesus took the occasion to say, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Our spiritual kinship with Jesus is even more important than the flesh-and-blood ties of earthly life. The Lord is reminding us that every day, as long as this today lasts, is a day to listen to what the Lord is saying to us. It is not for us to presume that we know everything there is to know. Each day is a day to grow in our knowledge and service of the Lord.

In times of hardship, in sad and sorrowful times, it is tempting to forget about the Lord. That is when we may need to listen to widows, those brave women who have known loss, and who have persevered in the love of God. "Jar of meal shall not be spent, jug of oil shall not be emptied, before the day when the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth."