32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. Christopher (2024)

 Some time ago I mentioned that the words we pray in the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass are placed there for a purpose. They are not there by chance. Every word in the Bible, even one-syllable words, have a significance. For example, “on the way *of* the kingdom,” and “on the way *to* the kingdom,” we are directed to different realities.

 In the Book of Deuteronomy, God commands us to put the word of God *on* our hearts. God did not say *in* our hearts. Isn’t that where God’s word should be? So, as Catholic University students, we asked a rabbi why the Bible says we are to place the word of God on our hearts instead of in our hearts. His response: “We are commanded to place the word of God on our hearts because our hearts are closed, and the word of God cannot get in. God commands us to place the word of God on our hearts, and there it sits and waits. It waits for the moment, for the day when our hearts are broken. When our hearts are broken, then the word of God will fall gently inside.”

 We believe in God, and what God can do, and what God does do. We express our conviction that God indeed loves us, cares for us, and will save us. But when things are going well, when we are confident of our strength and success, when we are convinced that we can handle things on our own, God’s word sits on our hearts, and waits. It cannot get inside because our hearts are too full of ourselves. God’s word sits and waits until…until we fail, until we are hurt, until we have to suffer with sickness, addiction, pain or death. It waits until our heart breaks, then it falls gently inside and gives us strength and peace. As of late, I have come to experience this.

 In today’s Scriptures, the central characters are two widows. In the ancient world, a widow was one of the most vulnerable members of society. Without family, her need was paramount. Her need nurtured her faith. Without family on which to depend, she depended on God alone.

 Jesus saves us from our false way of evaluating ourselves. “Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” The widow was praised, not for what she gave, but for who she was—a woman of faith, full of trust, totally reliant on God. And so, whether we are able to do a little or a lot, whether we are able to give a little or give in abundance, it is who we become in the doing, and in the giving, that is the greater gift that God desires. It is not the gift as much as the giver that is important to God.

 Jesus holds us these two widows for us to emulate. We can recall those others that Jesus admired, and what they did: a good Samaritan who went out of his way to minister to a wounded man; the forgiving father patiently waiting then welcoming home his prodigal son; the master who paid his servant a generous wage; the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to cure his slave; the tax collector Zacchaeus who gave away half od his possessions; and today, two widows who gave away all they had.

 It is easier to believe the word of God when we recognize our own need. Whenever we experience loss, failure, or pain—hope is there. God’s word is sitting on our hearts, waiting to console us and strengthen us. As difficult as our trials may be, they lead us to God. St Francis learn this. He experienced this on his journey in life, with life, for life. It’s our brokenness that allows the love of God in.