

HOMILY

The Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 8, 2009

10:00 AM Liturgy

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski

St. John the Evangelist Parish

Davison, Michigan

Someone has defined the difference between prosperity, recession and depression like this:

- ◆ During prosperity you are annoyed because the dog and cat won't eat the expensive canned food you buy them.
- ◆ In a recession you are delighted that the dog and cat won't eat the expensive canned food. You hope they remain finicky until things get better.
- ◆ In a depression you begin to look thoughtfully at the dog and cat.

According to experts in Washington, the recession is officially over. A lot of Americans are surprised to hear this. Many of our fellow citizens still have their own private recession

People have lost jobs and are unable to find new ones. Personal bankruptcies are at an all-time high. State governments are scrounging around trying to find funds to keep schools open. If you are among those still in the midst of your own personal recession, there is not much comfort in knowing that happy days are here again for everyone else.

Our lessons today are about two ladies who knew about recession. Both were widows. The first widow was out by the town gate one day gathering sticks. A stranger approached her and asked her for some water to drink. As she was going for the water he called out, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

This was more than the widow could handle. “As surely as the Lord lives, I don’t have anything baked—only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. I was collecting a couple of sticks to go in and prepare something for myself and my son. When we have eaten it, we shall die.”

She was in a desperate situation. It is difficult to believe, but there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people in our world even today who, like her, are just as desperate. They do not know for certain where their next meal is coming from. This widow’s situation appeared hopeless in her eyes, but not in the eyes of the stranger for the stranger was the Prophet Elijah. He knew God was a bountiful, giving God.

So Elijah said to this despondent woman, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread and bring it to me. Then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.’”

The widow did as Elijah said. And there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family, for the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry as the Lord had promised.

Our second widow is known to all of us. It was she who made her way quietly through a crowd of folks gathered in the temple. Some of these wealthier worshippers were throwing auspicious amounts of money into the temple treasury. Shyly, this faithful widow put in two very small copper coins worth only a fraction of a penny. This was the least one could put in the treasury. Rabbinic law forbade putting in just one coin; the smallest allowed was two. She put in the smallest amount possible. Someone was watching, though. It was Jesus. He said to his disciples, “*I tell you the truth. This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.*” Two widows caught in the midst of their own private recession.

Some of you have known such times. More than twenty-six million Americans today live below the poverty level. One sociologist recently estimated that one of every three young families in the United States today is only one paycheck away from bankruptcy.

What do you do when the recession comes to your house? What do you do when your needs are great and your resources are meager? Those needs may not be only financial, of course. The same principles that apply to our financial woes also apply to such things as material heartaches and concerns about our family, our health, or our job. What are these timeless principles?

For one thing, don't give up. That's what the first widow was ready to do. Before Elijah got hold of her, she was going to go home and make preparations for both herself and her son to die. That is about as desperate as a person can become. Some of you may have been nearly that desperate at some point in your life. Life can look so bleak at times. What do you do when you're that low? One thing you don't do is give up.

The second thing we need to do is to trust God. As much as we talk about faith, that's hard for some of us to do.

The great philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once described a familiar boyhood experience. He was being taught to swim by his father. Splashing wildly with both arms and kicking with one leg, he called to his father, "Look at me, look at me. I'm swimming!" But, says Kierkegaard, all the time he was holding onto the bottom of the swimming pool with his big toe.

How many of us are like that in our faith. "I have faith!" we declare. But it is an untested faith. It is a tentative faith. One toe remains on the bottom! It is an enormous step for some of us to abandon our fears and trust God. Such faith may be harder for us the older we get.

A father was telling about taking his four-year-old son to the local YMCA to take swimming lessons. He had some misgivings about this. He wondered how much a four-year-old could learn about swimming. To his surprise, the boy's teacher said, "I wish we could have gotten him a little earlier. It's so much easier to teach younger children to swim."

"Younger children?" the father asked in disbelief.

"Oh, we like to get them before they can walk," she replied. "Don't forget, a baby is in water for nine months before it is born. Also, babies are still very trusting and will allow you to do more with them."

How true—how very true. Somewhere along the way we lose that child-like ability to trust, to rest our concerns on God. The first widow had quit trusting God. Elijah came to her and gave her hope. He told her to trust God.

There is a third principle we need to remember: Someone is always watching. Jesus was watching as the second widow dropped in her two small coins. She had not quit trusting. Those two coins were all she had in the world and she was willing to turn them over to God. That's faith! No wonder Jesus praised her. What we need to see, however, is that Someone was watching the first widow as well.

It was God's command that Elijah came to this widow and helped her through the drought. We read in I Kings 17:8, *"Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah. 'Arise, go to Zarephath...and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.'"* Elijah, this holy man of God, thought God was providing for his needs. But God was also looking out for this widow and her son! They were all under God's watchful eye! And the good news, friends, the really good news, is that so are we.

There is a lesson here for those of us who have been caught in our own private recession—whatever that recession may mean for you. Don't give up. Trust in God. God is watching. He has not forgotten you. He will always give you what you need.

