

## **Homily: Nov. 7, 2021**

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

Every time we gather for the Eucharist, we eat two helpings: We eat the word of God from this special raised but smaller table and we eat our loving Savior from his altar table. Both provisions are great soul food. But we must let their sacred calories help us become what we receive. We don't always become what we receive in this sacred ritual, and so we call upon our compassionate God.

The scripture today is truly challenging us to think and get out of the small mental and spiritual box we might be in regarding our presence among people and about giving as well as helping. It all boils down to our basic motivation for doing things. Do I do what I do for my honor and glory or for God's? In the Gospel Jesus points at me, too, when he scolds those long-robed guys, reciting long prayers in front of others. I do often have to ask myself, "Why or for what reason am I doing all this activity in front of others---good and holy as it may appear on the outside?" I always have to check up on what's going on in here—in my heart and mind?

To get at what is inside our hearts, God just told us two widow stories. In the first reading, Prophet Elijah has the boldness to ask a poor widow with the last handful of food, to fix his meal first—albeit with the promise that her flour and oil jars would continue to have something in them. She trusts God's word through Elijah's brazen request—and she and her son do not starve but continue to live. Giving, even in great difficulty, but with full trust in the Lord, is a key take-away from that first widow story.

Then the second widow story, presents a woman who donates her last pennies, hence giving a blazing example of sacrificing for the kingdom of God. Jesus points her out particularly for his disciples to consider—and for us to ponder 2,000 years later. Jesus' stories remind me of several inspirational experiences with the rainforest people in Papua, Indonesia.

In August 2008, our one and only monastery in the rainforest burned down due to an early morning electrical short-circuit. Shortly after that devastating fire, in which most of us lost everything and I also lost 30 years of my richly annotated diaries, a poor local woman came to us apologizing that she couldn't give a large donation for rebuilding our monastery. She handed us a 5-lb box of aluminum roofing nails, saying, "I hope this little offering can help you build your new monastery." How precious was that!

We had other simple Catholics, Protestants and also Muslims who gave us clothing, food and money right after the fire. By the way, our Muslim sisters and brothers delighted in being able to join us Catholic Crosiers two years later when we had the blessing and grand opening of our new monastery.

These widow stories also reminded me of a Diocesan Synod we had in the early 1980s. We were discussing how simple villagers could participate more substantially in the life of the local church. Someone suggested that villagers sponsor the gas for our outboard motors. And one parishioner from the coast responded, "Gas is too expensive. It's beyond our means. But we can row you guys to the outstations with our dugout canoes and provide you with food." So, I took up the invitation of that parishioner for the next three years I was in that coastal parish. Both villagers and this pastor felt our sacrifices for those pastoral visits. I let my outboard set, and villagers picked me up. However, they would not give me an oar for me to join rowing with them. So I finally bought my own oar and joined the other rowers standing and rowing their dugout. Then I discovered something. Yes, I had to give up speed in doing my pastoral visit, but was in turn blessed to hear many stories, ask multiple questions, and witness various conversations between the rowers-- learning a lot about local life. And, I also learned to depend on them and their food. Our sacrifices resulted in a special relationship, which we talked about for years later.

Today God continues to ask you and me, "How can and will you and I contribute more significantly and meaningfully to the growth of God's kingdom of true love, peace and joy in this world—both far and near?"