

The Thirty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time November 7, 2021

Laura immigrated to the United States with her husband and daughter when she was 29 years old. Within days of arriving, she began working in a leather tannery. It was heavy, demanding work, unlike anything she had known in her home country. But she knew that she had to work hard for her family to have any kind of future in the New World.

Within a few years of being in the United States, her husband was diagnosed with cancer and died shortly thereafter, leaving her alone with her young daughter. Though Laura had come to the United States looking for a better life, it seemed that things were harder than ever. At that point, she had nothing but her faith and her love for her daughter to keep her going.

Laura was known for her great generosity by going out of her way to help others in the migrant community. She gave a dress to a friend who had a job interview, who had nothing to wear. But, that was the type of person Laura was. All her life, she gave whatever she had to help others, but most especially to her daughter and grandchildren.

She was very much like the widow in today's first reading and the widow in the gospel. Though she didn't have much, she gave what she had out of love for God and for others. In doing so, she was richly blessed in return.

St Paul tells us in (2 Cor 9:7) that "God loves a cheerful giver". That is because God Himself is a cheerful giver. Everything we have is a gift of God - not just our possessions but our very life comes from Him. He gladly provides for all of our needs because He loves us. Those who know God and have an intimate relationship with Him are also generous. They see the good things they have not as possessions to be guarded jealously but as blessings to be shared with others. Laura was just such a person. The widows in today's readings were also just such people.

There are many ways that we are called to give to others and many different levels of giving. Each level reveals just how generous we are.

There is giving that comes from our surplus wealth. It is money we have left over once we have paid our bills and bought all the things we want. Most people have no problem giving this "spare change" away if they see a panhandler on the side of the road. They might even put it in the collection basket at Mass. But, in the end, it is only leftovers. It doesn't change the life of the person who is giving it. While every little bit helps and even small amounts given in love can make a world of difference to a poor person, this type of donation is made with little effort on the part of most people.

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Another level of giving is a gift from one's substance. It is a donation that requires a sacrifice. It is the kind of contribution someone makes when they hear another person's story and it touches their heart. They can't just turn their back on them and do nothing. Even if it means going without a vacation or putting off a purchase, they give whatever they can. This is the level of giving that Laura exhibited when she gave her dress to her friend. She was willing to go without so that another could be blessed. Such a level of sacrificial giving changes the life not only of the person who receives it but the person who gives it. This is the level of giving that pleases God.

Those who give because they feel obligated to, are still doing good. But their heart is not in it. It is not done with love. Those who give to impress others or to show off how wealthy they are still do good. But such giving only makes them more proud. Those who give until it hurts, however, do so with love. It is out of the goodness that is within them that they give to others. In so doing, they are also enriched. Those who give sacrificially also do so with trust in God. They know that God will provide for them. Their generosity comes from a profound trust in their Heavenly Father. And nothing pleases God more than the love and trust of His beloved children.

How we choose to spend our money reveals a lot about what is important to us. If we give freely and cheerfully to others, if we are willing to make sacrifices out of love for others, we will become more generous and loving people. And we can expect to be blessed in return. We will discover what is most important in life - to measure our worth not in dollars and cents but in the people whose lives we touch. We will come to value ourselves not for what we have but for who we are. And we will find joy not in enriching ourselves but in enriching others.

The evangelical pastor, Mark Batterson, wrote, "If God has blessed you financially, raise your standard of giving not your standard of living." That is what God is calling us to - to give without counting the cost. He showed us the way by giving His very self on the cross so that we could share in His eternal life. At this table He offers Himself to us in Holy Communion. Now He calls us to do the same, so that everyone we come into contact with can share the blessings of the God who loves us and provides for us.