

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Liturgy flows out of last Sunday's Liturgy. In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus proclaimed the two great commandments: love God first and love our neighbors as ourselves. However, Jesus neither defined nor described love.

In Hebrews, we read, "*But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice.*" In essence, Jesus offered his life to God for us. In John's Gospel, Jesus redefined his commandment to love our neighbor: "*Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" [15:12b-13]. All authentic human love, then, is sacrificial.

In the Gospel story of the poor widow, we see her sacrificial love for God. Even in poverty, she gave all she had. All the others gave from their surplus, from what was left over after they had paid all the bills and bought everything they needed and wanted. In human eyes, the widow gave very little. In God's eyes, she gave more than any of them. In the reading from First Kings, the poor widow's willingness to share her last food and drink with the Prophet Elijah demonstrated her sacrificial love for others.

All three readings call us to sacrificial love for God and others modeled on Jesus' own sacrificial love for God and us. Do we sacrifice to give to God and others, or do we give to God and others out of our surplus time and resources? For many people today, time is more precious than money. How much time are we willing to give to God in prayer during the week? How willing are we to make the sacrifice to come to Sunday Eucharist even when we have a million other things to do? How willing are we to share our time and talents with our faith community?

The story of the widow of Zarephath confirms the insight of Fr. Libert Vander Kerken in his book *Loneliness and Love*. It is often said that we cannot give what we do not have. Fr. Vander Kerken argues that when it comes to love, we do not have what we do not give.<sup>1</sup> Because the widow was willing to share her last food with Elijah, she never ran out of food. The real test of our willingness to sacrifice for others is when we share our time and our resources with those who are most in need, those who are most unlike us, those who cannot or will not give us anything in return.

Finally, in *The Experience of Friendship*, William Sadler describes the five elements of true friendship. One of these elements is sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> On the most superficial level, we sacrifice for our friends when we are willing to do what they want to do rather than what we want to do, for example, to see the movie they want to see rather than the movie we want to see. We sacrifice for our friends when we are there for them when they need us even though we have other important things to do. We sacrifice for our friends when we consistently put their needs, desires, and feelings on at least an equal par with ours, when we cherish them in their otherness.

My brothers and sisters, the instruction formerly given to couples in their wedding Liturgy captures the relationship between love and sacrifice: "Sacrifice is usually difficult and irksome. Only love can make it easy; and perfect love can make it a joy. We are willing to give in proportion as we love. And when love is perfect, the sacrifice is complete" [1962 *Rituale Romanum*]. This was true for Jesus; it remains true for us.

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<sup>1</sup>L. Vander Kerken, S.J., *Loneliness and Love*, (NY: Sheed & Ward, 1967), p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>William A. Sadler, Jr., "The Experience of Friendship," *Humanitas*, Vol 6(2), 1970, 177-209, p. 208.