

Sunday, November 10, 2024 – Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Widows are visible everywhere in today's readings. Jesus denounces those scribes who pray impressive prayers but devour widows' houses. He commends the poor widow who in his view gave far more than the major donors. Jesus doesn't see her simply as an object of compassion or charity. She, like the widow of Zarephath who shares her last bit of food with Elijah, does something of great importance.

Prayer of the Day

O God, you show forth your almighty power chiefly by reaching out to us in mercy. Grant us the fullness of your grace, strengthen our trust in your promises, and bring all the world to share in the treasures that come through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

¹Naomi said to [Ruth,] "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. ²Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. ³Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do." ⁵She said to her, "All that you tell me I will do."

^{4:13}So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Psalm 127

¹Unless the LORD builds the house, their labor is in vain who build it.

Unless the LORD watches over the city, in vain the sentinel keeps vigil.

²**It is in vain to rise so early and go to bed so late;**

vain, too, to eat the bread of toil; for you, LORD, give sleep to your beloved.

³Children are a heritage from the LORD,
and the fruit of the womb is a gift.

⁴**Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.**

⁵Happy is the one whose quiver is full of them!

Such a one will not be put to shame when contending with enemies in the gate.

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28

²⁴Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; ²⁶for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, ²⁸so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Gospel: Mark 12:38-44

³⁸As [Jesus] taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

⁴¹He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Prayers of Intercession

Rooted in God's abundant love for the world, let us pray for our neighbors, the church, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

Renew your church, O God. Make us servants to one another for the sake of the gospel. Instill a heart for service and a passion for justice in our bishops, deacons, pastors, and lay leaders. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew your creation, O God. Sustain the earth and seas and all that is in them. Kindle in us a reverent awe for all creatures great and small, and strengthen us in our pursuit of climate justice. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew the nations, O God. Heal our nation's veterans from the unseen wounds of war. Tend to their trauma and soothe burdened consciences. Guide leaders of the world to end conflicts and pursue peace. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew your people, O God. Protect those in our communities who are vulnerable or ill. Accompany persons who are unemployed or underemployed, children who are in foster care, and those who live alone. Watch over and uphold them. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Renew this congregation, O God. Give us clarity in our mission and boldness in our witness. Bless our ministries that attend to basic needs of any who lack sufficient resources, that all may live with dignity. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Happy are those whose help was in you. We give thanks for all your faithful ones who praised you as their God all their life long. As we eagerly wait for you, inspire us by their lives of service. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We offer our prayers to you, gracious God, trusting in your boundless love for all that you have made, through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

A reflection for this twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Be Not Afraid

How would you live if you were not afraid? Fear is used by politicians to gain our votes, by the media to get our attention, by advertising firms to sell us what we don't need, and by TV evangelists to get our donations. What fears are used against us? One is scarcity, the fear that we won't have enough or won't get our share. Our false belief that having more money and "stuff" will save us binds us as slaves. In many cases, having less can free us to live by faith.

The writer of Hebrews 11:1 states, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Normally, we read forward from this verse, but the word "Now" is a clue that we should look back. Hebrews 10:39 says, "But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved." Who shrinks back? Those who are afraid. Who are saved? By implication, those who do not shrink back and are not afraid. So fear is not only a faith issue but an issue of our salvation. And is that not what we would expect? What more do we need to be saved from than our worst fears? What good is a savior who does not help us confront our fears? As noted above, our fears are the handles that marketers, politicians, and supervisors often use to control us and bend us to their plans and desires.

But like the pain that warns us of injury and nausea that tells us we are becoming ill, our fear has a positive use: it lets us know our vulnerability, and it tells us what we truly value and truly trust. "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). The powers and principalities promise us what we can see. Where do we put our true faith and trust?



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