

## Homily 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time 2021

In West Africa in the country of Sierra Leone I met many widows. These were the poorest of the poor many of whom had no-one to support them. They live dependant totally on the good will of other villagers and relied on the community for their basic needs. I remember one old widow woman, when I visited a far out village with one of our nurses, offering us food in gratitude for what we were doing for the sick and the children in her community. She had very little but from the little she had she was willing to give to us.

The Prophet Elijah in the First Reading from Kings asks a similarly destitute widow for food. She has little for she and her son but is willing to share the little and thus save Elijah from starvation. Elijah promises her abundance because of her act of unselfish kindness, the jar of meal was not spent and the jug of oil was not emptied. Thus God rewards the poor who give generously of the little they have. Our God is a God of abundance for those who give generously of themselves.

In The Gospel Jesus is scathing of the priests and Jewish leaders who extort money from the poor - 'men who swallow up the property of widows'. St Mark contrasts their shameful behaviour with that of a poor widow who gives all she has to The Treasury of The Temple.

What are these texts saying to us today? First and foremost that widows, strangers and orphans - the poor have to be the focus of our Christian love and action. Secondly, that we have to deal with the poor with justice defending them and speaking out for those who have no voices but ours. Thirdly, ultimately, God is on the side of the poorest in society and will in the end provide for them, Fourthly, we as the richest in the world have to be careful that we don't, consciously or unconsciously, act like the Jewish priests and leaders looking down on the poor exploiting their countries' resources. Finally, like the poor widow at The Treasury, we should give our all in the service of The Gospel.

Another poor widow, whom I named Veronica, came to my aid whilst I was on a trek to a mountain village in Rwanda. Exhausted and dehydrated I could not move one foot in front of the other. Veronica brought the little water she had and bathed my face and encouraged me to sip of the life-giving liquid. I'll never forget Veronica's generosity giving of the little she had. What a lesson in Christian love. These two widows in my life epitomise the widow in today's Gospel - humble, generous, selfless servant disciples of The Gospel.