

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

I Kings 17: 10-16

Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

Hebrews 9: 24-28

Mark 12: 38-44 (or 12: 41-44)

John T. Denny, O.S.A.

Today's Responsorial Psalm invites us to "Praise the Lord, my soul!" And the first verse of the psalm tells us the reason for this joyous praise. It is because "the Lord keeps faith forever."

"The Lord keeps faith forever." That's an interesting thought – an unusual approach to describing God's relationship with us. Life often presents the challenge of reflecting on our faith in God. But that is not what the psalmist presents here.

In a thoughtful twist, Psalm 146 asks us to consider the Lord's faith. And when we ask, "What does the Lord have faith in?" The only answer to present itself is, "the Lord has faith in us – the People of God!" "And what about us does the Lord have faith in?" I believe that our Readings today, particularly our first reading from 1 Kings and the Gospel, provide the key to answering that.

Both of today's widows are clearly persons of faith. They seem calm and peaceful, even as I King's widow informs Elijah that she and her son will soon die from starvation. Their actions display a profound trust in God. They recognize that the future is God's realm.

Their lives have certainly been hard. They have suffered. They have struggled. And in the struggles of their lives they have learned one of life's central facts. We are not in charge. God is. We don't choose to be born or to die, nor much of what happens between. These widows, on the surface, appear to have nothing of worth – nothing of value. With a closer look, however, we see that they possess an understanding that is, in the words of the credit card commercial, "priceless".

They have learned that: what gives meaning to their lives, what makes the struggles have purpose, what gives a calm certainty to their living is knowing who is ultimately in charge.

We can often forget that. It is especially easy to forget when, through real effort, we have achieved some worthwhile accomplishments, and life is progressing smoothly. It often takes a hard knock from life to bring us back to reality. And the concrete ways that we choose to respond to those reality checks set the tone and purpose of our lives.

God having faith in us means that God knows that we can figure it out. God knows what we are capable of. Our Creator knows that we can come to understand the nature of how life works – how reality operates. God knows that His Son has graced us with the gift of the Eucharist. And, when our relationship with God is rooted in that great gift, we know that "the Lord keeps faith forever." For in that relationship we will know that God is God, and that we are God's instruments. That is how it is, and not vice-versa. And when, with God's grace, we figure that out, our lives will display the same calm spirit and faith filled certainty of the holy women whose praises are sung in today's Scripture.

And so, as we gather around this table of the Lord, as we are feed this bread from heaven, this never ending gift, let us thank God for keeping faith and ask for the grace and courage to imitate, in real ways, in our own lives, these two widows.