

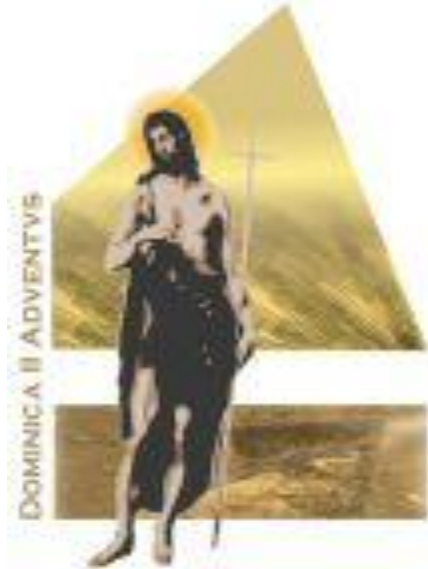
Second Sunday of Advent

Bar 5:1-9

Ps 126:1-6

Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Luke 3:1-6



Life can often be confusing, frustrating and disappointing.

It is easy to feel that we have been dealt the short end of the stick or cheated.

People, though innocent, often expect impossible things of us and we find ourselves lacking the energy or will to respond to yet another request.

We are familiar with the anecdote that “God does not give us more than we can handle,” and wonder when enough is enough.

Individuals and families are dealing with enormous stresses these days.

The economy, personal life choices, children, health and happiness all compete for our attention every day.

And, into this confusing mess we call life God interjects a call for peace.

We hear of God’s mercy, love, and compassion.

We remember God’s instruction that every hair on our heads is counted and we are cared for more than the sparrows.

But, when life seems to be crumbling and falling apart, where is this God?

Can more possibly be asked when we feel that we have already given in abundance?

The widow of Zarephath most certainly felt this way.

Here she is struggling with nothingness, wondering how she is going to make bread with a handful of flour and a little oil and Elijah interjects a request.

In addition to asking for water, he adds a blatant demand for a “bit of bread.”

Even for the most well-intentioned, respectful person, this is arrogance at its best!

The widow has nothing, she is tired, she is the sole provider for her son, and she does not know how she is going to get enough food.

She is probably overwhelmed, disgusted, disappointed, and feeling cheated.

In short, she is not having a great day! In the midst of all of this, this character Elijah, whom she does not know, comes before her insisting that she get him water and bread!

She prepares her defense and remains calm.

She explains to Elijah that she has nothing.

She has no bread prepared, just enough flour and oil to make a small amount of bread, and she's gathering sticks so that she can make a little, eat, and die.

We must remember that Zarephath was encountering a severe drought, so dying was an imminent possibility.

The image is created, however, that the widow in today's story is not in good shape!

We are often not in good shape and life's expectations and events continue.

When is the load going to be lightened?

When can things return to normal?

When will I stop feeling tired?

Why did I have to get stricken with this horrible cancer?

Why did my spouse have to die?

Why are my children without a mother?

Why is God placing this burden, which I cannot carry, on my shoulders?

When life knocks us down, there is always someone or something asking us to get up!

Who or what is our Elijah?

Who or what in our lives is asking us for water and bread when we have nothing left?

At this point, most of us shut down.

We may feel that requests like this are over the top and unreasonable.

We can easily lose faith in God because we believe him to be the one to lighten the load, not to allow it to get heavier.

We turn away. We get angry, bitter, and resentful.

We can become self-focused and even selfish and assume a defensive posture toward life, not allowing anyone or anything to demand anything of me unless I want to give it!

And, so there we are. We are frustrated, angry, and unhappy.

What about the widow?

Is this where she ended up?

No. Something in the core of her being beckoned her to trust Elijah and draw assurance from his presence.

He affirmed the direction she had chosen in desiring to gather sticks and commence preparation.

This must have calmed her at least for the moment; providing a certain measure of contentment and purpose.

She may have even thought, "My son and I will be alright."

Then, Elijah did the unthinkable and pushed the envelope.

Feed me first.

Wow! That's it, throw in the towel and call it quits!

Now, let's be honest.

If any of us had our last morsel and someone asked it of us, what would we do?

Elijah assured the widow that salvation is coming, that all looks dismal now but will get better and overflow with abundance!

And what did she choose?

She trusted.

This is the only response that could bring her to an effective, stable place.

Continuing her futile war with starvation and the lack of bread would surely bring her and her son death. Instead, she chose the promise.

She chose God.

She from her nothingness gave it all away!

She turned from her own needs to the needs of another and in doing so discovered life!

And life she received.

Never again did the flour jar go empty or the oil run dry!

The promise of the Lord had been fulfilled.

She received in abundance fulfillment, contentment, and happiness.

We see this again with the widow in today's Gospel who gave her last two small coins and we see it in brave folks throughout history who risked truly "throwing their cares upon the Lord" and finding life!

Difficult life experiences can certainly throw us for a loop.

They can often make little sense when measured against what we think is God's plan.

But, ultimately, what God wants is to bring us to a place of trust.

He wants his Elijahs and his widows to learn to trust him in every circumstance and in every condition; regardless of how it may look.

The moral of the story was true then and is true now and it remains the same as ages pass.

It is this. You have to give it all away before you can get anything back.

We have such a hard time understanding this mystery.

We have a hard time understanding what can bring us peace.

We have a hard time understanding the purpose of living.

But, once we unlock the door and trust that once we enter, salvation comes, we will find ourselves exactly where God wants us to be.

Life often asks the impossible or the unreasonable of us.

We can trust that God is in charge and do our best to respond or feel betrayed and sink further into sadness and despair.

What will we choose?