

Homily of Fr. Larry Purcell at St. Thomas Aquinas

8:45, November 11, 2018

The Overarching story of the Bible is God's compassionate mercy and justice to the vulnerable and the needy. In 1968 the Latin American bishops met in Medellin, Columbia and called that aspect of Gods mercy God's preferential option for the poor. That was the year before Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, was ordained a priest. Therefore, it is no surprise that he has an intense love for the poor and feels that the preferential options for the church should also be the poor.

Today we have two more examples of God noticing and reaching out to those who need God most. Widows were among the most vulnerable people in the society of biblical times.

Elijah is a Jewish prophet; the widowed mother is a gentile.

Unlike the belief of her people that their gods' power was

limited to their national boundaries, Elijah's God has no such limits -- and so she trusts the prophet and his God.

And God greatly rewards her faith and trust and her hospitality in such dire straights.

The plight of widows is mentioned twice in today's gospel.

First Jesus denounces some of the scribes who have cheated and misused the funds of widows that had been entrusted to their management following the death of the husband. In a sense they were the religious trustees of husbands' estates.

The very ones who should have defended and protected widows' rights took advantage of them. In the second scene Jesus laments religious system that took from widow who deserved to be helped.

The readings speak to a particular cultural/religious system at the time of Jesus.

But they don't let any of us off the hook in the 21st century.

The readings call us to imitate God's compassionate mercy and justice to the vulnerable and the needy. They call us to

examine how generous we have been in offering ourselves to God's service, especially to least and overlooked, like widows who wouldn't have been noticed except by Jesus.

In our time someone who notices the poor and the needy is Sister Carol Keehan. She is a Daughter of Charity who has been the CEO of CHA [Catholic Health Association] since 2005 and she has announced her retirement next year.

When she became CEO, one of the first things she did was to become expert in Medicaid Law, because Medicaid was and is the primary way that the poor receive their healthcare -- AND -- It is highly doubtful the Affordable Care Act would have passed in 2010 without her support. Her courage and insight put her at odds with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops who opposed Obamacare.

President Obama was so appreciative to her, he gave her one of the pens he used to sign the ACA into law.

I'm worn down by politics and politicians and I'm glad the midterms are over -- **but now what?** Despite our fatigue, it is

important for the Church and for us Catholics to have a voice in the Public Square. Our generosity is important, but it is not sufficient to address the root causes of poverty in our country and society. Societal solutions and intervention are also necessary. Not just the generosity of individual purse strings.

During his ministry Jesus frequently said: **Let those who have eyes, see and those who have ears, hear.** In baptism we have been given the eyes and ears of Jesus.

We might ask ourselves: Do we see the poor around us with the eyes of Jesus? Substitute for the word poor: sick/refugee/prisoner on death row. Do we hear their cries do we see their plight?

What are the causes of poverty and suffering in our community? In the struggling nations? What can I and my church community do to address these conditions and improve the welfare of the poor, so that the poor are not treated as invisible but rather are loved like God's chosen ones. So, our efforts go on, our voices need to be heard **and**

we need to take action.