

32nd Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year B

The great drought, which is the backdrop of chapters 17-19, seems to be a divine punishment for the king's idolatry, but it also provides an opportunity to show the superiority of the God of Israel over the Canaanite god Baal. Elijah is an itinerant prophet who lived 850 years before Christ. He wore only a hair cloak and a leather loincloth.² To the Canaanites the god Baal was master of the forces of nature—rain, storms, fertility, etc. Through Elijah the true God reveals himself to be distinct from and higher than all those forces. Elijah is the champion of the rights of God and of the poor. He went to King Ahab who was on the point of supplanting the official religion of the Lord God of Israel with the cult of Baal, and predicted three years of drought and then he hid near the brook Cherith where he was fed by ravens. From there he went to Zarephath in Phoenicia where he was outside the jurisdiction of King Ahab who was persecuting him.¹

1 Kings 17:10-16

¹⁰In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath. Zarephath is a Sidonian town—a territory acknowledged as Baal's, not Yahweh's. Yet, the power of Yahweh has caused drought even there.¹² As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink."

¹¹She left to get it, and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread."

¹²She answered, "As the Lord, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die."

¹³Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid. Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son."

¹⁴For the Lord, the God of Israel, says, The promise. "The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth."

¹⁵She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well;

¹⁶the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the Lord had foretold through Elijah. The fulfillment. Although He caused the drought, Yahweh protects those whom He favors with miraculous food similar to manna.¹² It is interesting that it was a poor widow at death's door whom God chose to give the prophet nourishment. Jesus uses the fact that it was a widow and a foreigner who was chosen, to show that God gives his gifts to whomever he pleases, not to those who think they have a right to them.¹

Hebrews 9:24-28

²⁴Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. By his glorious Ascension into heaven Jesus Christ crowns his redemptive sacrifice and intercedes for us as our advocate in the presence of God the Father. St. John of Avila preached that Jesus had to suffer on our behalf so that he could stand before the Father's house and show him his wounds and his sufferings, and say to him, "Eternal Father, if you truly love me, so also truly love those for whom I have labored."³

²⁵Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; Between the sacrifices of the Old Covenant and the sacrifice of Christ there are numerous points of contact for the former are a foreshadowing of the latter. However, there are also substantial differences: the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law were multiple, Christ's sacrifice was unique; the Mosaic sacrifices did not really have the power to forgive sins,

Christ's sacrifice does; the Mosaic ones were done with the blood of animals, Christ shed his own blood; the Mosaic ones belong to the time of waiting and preparation, Christ's sacrifice marks the beginning of "the fullness of time."³

26if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. The author rejects the notion of repeated sacrifices of Jesus but accepts the eternal continuance of his one sacrifice. The author sees the heavenly sanctuary as having always existed, but the heavenly sacrifice, which is now eternally present in the heavenly sanctuary, entered into the eternal order at a determined point of time.⁴ **But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice.** The sacrifice of Jesus the Christ is offered once, for all persons and for all time. The Holy of Holies no longer needs repeated consecration because Jesus continues to make His one offering there. The author rejects the notion of repeated sacrifices of Jesus, not the eternal continuance of His one sacrifice as is evidenced by the statement "at the end of the ages" — His sacrifice is offered eternally.¹²

27Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, The result of the fall of Adam and Even.¹² **and after this the judgment,** The particular judgment takes place immediately after death.¹²

28so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, The Greek word used here means both "to take away" and "to bear" and so it is well suited to express the fact that Jesus took away sin by taking it upon himself. Notice that the idea of vicarious sin-bearing is prominent, but there is no hint of vicarious punishment.⁴ **will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.** Verses 27 and 28 point out three basic truths: 1)all will die, 2)there is a judgment immediately after death and 3)Christ will come in glory at the end of time not for the purpose of redeeming men from sin but rather to bring salvation or glory to those who place their hope in him. At the Second Coming, Christ will come as Judge.³ The early Church never forgot the hope of the Second Coming. It throbbed through their belief. But we must note one thing—for the unbeliever that was a day of terror. If in that day Christ comes as a friend, it can only be a day of glory: if He comes as a stranger or as one whom we have regarded as an enemy, it can only be a day of judgment.⁵ In the New Testament period, there was a general expectation that Christ's second coming was imminent.⁶

Mark 12:38-44

38In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes Jesus makes a series of charges against the Jewish religious leaders. These men walked around in flowing robes in which they could neither hurry nor work, and which were the sin of the leisurely man of honor.⁷ **and accept greetings in the marketplaces,** This referred to being greeted with deep ceremonial bows in recognition of their superior position in the community as experts in the Law.⁴

39seats of honor in synagogues, The scribes would sit facing the people on the bench before the Ark containing the biblical scrolls.⁴ **and places of honor at banquets.** Places of honor were strictly fixed. The first place was that on the right of the host, the second that on the left of the host, and so on, alternating right and left, round the table. It was easy to tell the honor in which a man was held by the place at which he sat.¹¹ St. Bede noted that Jesus reproves *disordered* desire for human honors: "We should notice that salutations in the marketplace are not forbidden, nor people taking the best seats if that befits their positions; rather, the faithful are warned to avoid those who set too much store by such honors."¹⁰

40They devour the houses of widows Lawyers in antiquity could serve as trustees of a widow's estate. A common way of receiving their fee was to get a share of the estate. Those lawyers with a reputation for piety had a good chance to be selected as a trustee.¹² **and, as a pretext recite lengthy prayers.** They were notorious for saying long prayers. It has been said that the prayers were not so much offered to God as they were offered to men. They were offered in such a place and in such a way that no one could fail to see how pious they were.¹¹ **They will receive a very severe condemnation."** Here Jesus exposes the impure motives of these religious leaders. They received no official pay, so they depended upon the hospitality extended by devout Jews. Some of them used this custom to exploit people, cheating the poor out of everything they had and even taking advantage of the rich. Their spirituality was an act to gain respect, status, and recognition. Jesus warned the people against the teachers of religion who loved to appear holy but in reality were phonies. Their punishment would be great because as leaders they carry great responsibility in shaping the faith of the people.⁷

41He sat down opposite the treasury This probably refers to the women's court around whose walls were placed 13 trumpet-shaped chests for offerings.⁴ **and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.** Jesus has noticed a number of wealthy donors who have made little effort to conceal the size of their offerings. He contrasts this with a poor widow who has but two of the smallest coins in circulation.⁹

42A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. The small copper coins were the smallest denomination in circulation.¹²

43Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. Jesus measures the worth of her offering in terms of the sacrifice or self-offering involved.⁴ It is one of the Precepts of the Church that the faithful have the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church, each according to his abilities.⁸ (CCC 2043)

44For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, This widow has given away her whole subsistence. This is an important point for at this moment in Jesus' life, the woman typifies the folly Jesus himself is about to commit—to give his ALL for the ransom of many. The follower that Jesus admires will, like the poor widow, give all, though he may not be noticed by anyone but the Lord.⁹ **her whole livelihood."** The care of widows and orphans in the earliest days of Christianity was a ministry of consequence and one to be greatly admired. Widows were women whose husbands had died, just as we use the word now, but they were also members of a dedicated and enrolled ministry in the Church, alongside bishops, priests and deacons.⁶

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Navarre Bible: Joshua—Kings", (2) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (3) "The Navarre Bible: Hebrews," (4) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (5) "The Letter To The Hebrews" by William Barclay, (6) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2006" by Martin Connell, (7) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (8) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (9) "Mark: Good News for Hard Times" by George T. Montague, S.M. (10) "The Navarre Bible: St. Mark" (11) "The Gospel of Mark" by William Barclay, and (12) The St. Charles Borromeo Online Commentary.

I've been feeling a little useless and ran across this insight from Jim O'Bryon: Just remember:
Noah was a drunk,
Abraham was too old,
Isaac was a daydreamer,

Jacob was a liar,
Leah was ugly,
Joseph was abused,
Moses had a stuttering problem,
Gideon was afraid,
Samson had long hair and was a womanizer,
Jeremiah and Timothy were too young,
David had an affair and was a murderer,
Elijah was suicidal,
Isaiah preached naked,
Jonah ran from God,
Naomi was a widow,
Job went bankrupt,
Peter denied Christ,
The disciples fell asleep while praying,
Martha worried about everything,
The Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once,
Zacchaeus was too small,
Paul was too religious,
Timothy had an ulcer, AND
LAZARUS WAS DEAD!

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.