

Rev. Donato Infante
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As I was praying with these readings, an incident came to mind from when I was in college. Before I tell you, lest you think I'd ever get up here and tell a story about you, causing you to fear, "Can I go talk to Father? I don't want to end up in a homily," I did ask the permission of my college friends for permission to share stories about them, since so many good faith conversations happen during that time of life.

To understand this story, you first must know that as freshmen, we could not have cars on campus. When we had access to one, it was a big deal.

So one night, a friend down the hall knocks on my door and says, "Hey, I'm thinking of going to Taco Bell. Do you want to come?" "It's a Friday in Lent," I replied. His face fell. You can tell what I said was eating at him. "But I really am craving a Chalupa Supreme," he replied. "Wait until midnight? It's already 10." I offered. "They close at 11." "You can buy one, wait the hour, and break the fast with it." And he said, "But I want it now." In my mind, if I'm going to break a fast, it's not going to be for Taco Bell, but for something like filet mignon, but to each his own. Instead I said, "Well, we all make choices." Then he said to me, "I'm all in favor of doing the Lent thing, but I really want Taco Bell today. I don't think God expects me to *sacrifice*." And he hopped in his car and went. I know because he went and came back and ate it in front of me. And he didn't even ask if I wanted him to pick me up something to have at midnight!

Today's reading of the poor woman is not just about her willingness to give a larger share of her income than the others. As a priest friend of mine says, it is not about divine economics. It's about her willingness to sacrifice, which is not about how much she gives, but about what she gives: her heart. Pope St. Leo the Great, commenting on this passage in the 5th century, explained: "On the scales of divine justice the quantity of gifts is not weighed, but the weight of hearts."

Likewise, in the first reading is also about a woman willing to give up all that remained, to make a sacrifice to help God's prophet, because she believed his assurance that God would provide. He invited to her to have deep faith and trust.

In my opening story, my friend was not being asked to give up chalupas because God somehow has something against chalupas. I am quite sure that God looks upon chalupas and says, "It is good" (although maybe not Taco Bell ones). My friend was being invited to say to God, "I have sinned against you, and I am unworthy of your forgiveness. You give it anyway, and as a gesture of gratitude, I give you my heart, symbolized by not eating the chalupa for an hour."

In first world countries where we are used to comfort, we don't do so well with sacrifice. We have become soft. We like to have and do now what we want to have and do now. In the Middle Ages, when people had less, they had stronger wills, and they fasted more. No one fasts as little as we moderns do. So, we are not just weak, giving in, but we also make excuses to justify it to ourselves like, "Surely God does not me to forgive *him*," "Sure I trust God, but only when it makes sense to do so," or when teens say, "I would go to that family event to make my grandparents happy, but I did get a better offer from friends."

We cut corners in our spiritual life all the time, not out of weakness, but because we justify it to ourselves that God cannot possibly ask us to make sacrifices. In all of these, we remain attached to our own willfulness and we remain in control, whereas we are invited with the woman of the first reading and the woman of the Gospel passage to throw ourselves into the hands of God and say, "I surrender all." To say with Christ on the cross, "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

To affirm with another heroic woman, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who said, "[For] love to be real, it must cost. It must hurt. It must empty us of self." This is known to as dying to self, and Scripture tells us it is where strength is found.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

May we have the grace to find that true strength, the strength of self-sacrifice.