

Having listened closely to the Gospel you may be thinking: Oh! No, not another sermon on giving! Wrong, not a sermon, a story.

After graduating as an engineer, my youngest brother, Sean, got his first job with Shell Oil Company and was sent to Qatar, in the Gulf.

With him was another, just qualified young man from a small town in Texas, 8000 miles away, his family, longtime members of a Baptist church there.

As he got his pay every month, he sat down and wrote a check for 10%, a tithe of that monthly pay, to his church back in Texas.

That is what Scripture advocates, that was the tradition of his church, he thought it normal. -----
My brother never became a Baptist. End of story.

Now a reflection on the Scriptures of this day. They are about much more than baking bread or putting coins in the collection box.

The Old Testament and the gospel are about powerful people and widows. In those days widows could be among the poorest, the most abandoned, the most in need of care. The Scriptures are constantly referring to them as those most cherished by God.

We also have reference to people with power. Elijah was one such.

It is true that he was persecuted by the king, but it was precisely because he worked powerful miracles and was highly esteemed by the ordinary people.

He is also portrayed as being arrogant, demanding the first loaf. In contrast we have a powerless, helpless widow at the end of her means and yet prepared to serve a complete stranger.

Similar Situation in the Gospel story. On the one hand the scribes, men in position of great power, the legal scholars, demanding to be treated with honor, seeking to enrich themselves at the expense of widows.

On the other hand, one of their victims perhaps, an impoverished widow, with a big heart, generous to a fault in supporting the temple.

This is a constant theme in Sacred Scripture, the contrast between the rich and powerful on one hand and the poor and powerless on the other.

We know which side Jesus was on. Are we on the same side? Let us look closely at our world. Many thousands of homeless. If affordable housing is proposed, it is NIMBY.

Many more thousands of refugees seeking asylum, drowning in the Mediterranean Sea-or the Rio Grande.

Huge gap between the haves and have nots. Modern day scribes and widows. We are driven by fear; we are manipulated by fear.

We are told that our way of life is being put in danger. As

Christians we must look at all of this through the lens of the Gospel, put aside fear and embrace the people of God, the children of God, no matter their ethnicity or social status.

I do see glimmers of hope. The first is you. You give so generously, over \$100,000 last year, to support the volunteers of the Vincent de Paul, in their continued efforts to help the poor.

You have Gospel compassion. You volunteer to help the Winter nights program that gives shelter to the homeless, you have Gospel compassion. The sewing group provides clothing for children around the world, you have Gospel compassion.

The second glimmer of hope is a country called Bangladesh. It is a Muslim country, one of the poorest countries in the world, about one third the size of California.

Yet it has welcomed some 800,000 refugees.

A pagan widow of Zarephath could welcome a stranger, a Jew. A poor Muslim nation could welcome 800,000.

Compassion in action...Where do we Christians stand? Is our world view Gospel based?

As you can see, I don't have many answers, only questions.

But I think the questions are important. To repeat myself, the Gospels should be the lens through which we Christians view the world.

Every human action or inaction, every human laws subject to scrutiny with that lens.

In all things may Jesus Christ be praised!