

November 8, 2015

**Amen I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the others,
for she gave from her poverty**

*We want to go out from the four walls of the Church in search of those
who are distant, those who are on the 'outskirts' of life*

Background

John Pilch, a biblical historian, comments on today's Gospel. *"The word for 'widow' in Hebrew carries the meaning of one who is silent, who is unable to speak, for women remained secluded with the children within the home, unable to speak on their own behalf. 'Widows' constituted a major concern in the early Christian community."*

There are the widows of today - those who are silent, unable to speak for themselves. Pope Francis during the recent Synod spoke eloquently to this reality in our midst:

"We want to save the lost. We want to embrace the thinking of God who in his mercy reinstates the lost by turning evil into good. We want to follow Jesus' way of mercy and reinstatement by welcoming the repentant prodigal; by healing the wounds of sin with courage and determination; by rolling up our sleeves and not stand by watching passively the suffering of the world. We want to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart. We want to go out from the four walls of the Church in search of those who are distant, those who are on the 'outskirts' of life. We want to adopt fully God's own approach to seek the sick and save the lost, to turn condemnation into salvation."

Helping Hands

For some time, we have been reflecting here at St. Mary on how we can go out from her four walls in search of those who are distant, who are on the outskirts of life in our county. Many members of our parishioners are already doing much for those in need. What we have been asking here is, how is St. Mary - as a parish - reaching out to those on the outskirts of life? How is St. Mary, in Pope Francis's words, being a field hospital for our most vulnerable and needy?

There are already a number of programs in the county offering such assistance. "Helping Hands" is one of them. It provides assistance to those people, men and women, who are on the edge to be able to recover from their exclusion and reenter into a meaningful and productive life. Many of those needing help are veterans who are struggling to recover from their war experience. We talk so much about "honoring our veterans." This is one program that is doing just that throughout the entire north county.

Helping Hands is already up and functioning in three locations in Oregon. It has a proven track record and is now establishing itself in Tillamook. Alan Evans, the founder of Helping Hands, has garnered strong support from the local community. He has purchased the old

Officer's Quarters in the Port of Tillamook down by the blimp hangers to be the Center. It is a large lovely building that will provide adequate housing for men, women and children to live as they begin their recovery and reentry into society. The condition of the building however is in disrepair. It needs much work, not having been used in decades. One of its immediate needs is a new heating system. There is urgency in this because of the arrival of winter.

This brought into immediate focus the discussions St. Mary has had about offering assistance to those in need. Shouldn't St. Mary help here? After consulting with the parish council, I made the decision that St. Mary award Helping Hands a grant in the amount of \$10,000, the amount needed to purchase and install a new heating system. This was just this past Tuesday.

Financial Arrangement

There are two aspects to this decision. The first is the financials involved. St. Mary has two different funds: a Savings for the life and work of the Church, and Funds for the construction of our new entry into the Church. A year or so ago, St. Mary received a bequest of \$99,000 to be used for the life and work of the church. It is not to be used for the construction of the new entry; these are two separate accounts. So there was the \$99,000 sitting in our Savings. The question was, in view of the immediate needs of Helping Hands, how can we just let this bequest sit there.

Parish Involvement

Because of the immediacy of this need, there was no time to consult our parish community regarding this decision like we did with the construction of our New Entry. With the entry, we first discussed this in church, then sent out a survey asking for people's opinions, then held a Town Hall open to all, and then invited people to continue sending in their comments until the final decision was made. This is our normal way of proceeding in how St. Mary "goes out from her four walls in search of those who are distant, those who are on the 'outskirts' of life."

We hear Pope Francis speaking to the heart of St. Mary:

"We want to save the lost. We want to embrace the thinking of God who in his mercy reinstates the lost by turning evil into good. We want to follow Jesus' way of mercy; by welcoming the repentant prodigal; by healing the wounds of sin; by rolling up our sleeves and not stand by watching passively the suffering of the world. We want to go out from these four walls in search of those who are distant, those who are on the 'outskirts' of life."

Thank you for your understanding and support. It is you who make this possible. It is this which gives such meaning to being a part of the life and work of St. Mary by the Sea.

Thank You