

We have heard read that widows place a large role in both our first reading and today's gospel. Throughout the scriptures of Old and New Testaments, we read that widows and orphans are the special concern of the faith community. There was no safety net for these people in the culture of their times.

Now I realize there are probably a number of widows worshipping with us today. And, if we stop to think of it, most all of us are orphans. So my words today are not aimed at specific people in either group. "Widows and orphans" are the groups that represent all people who lack the necessities of life, those who are marginalized and often left on their own to perish. This is so contrary to who we say that we are. It has been said that the strength of a democratic nation is how it cares for the least of its citizens. And the church has declared that Christians should exercise a preferential option for the poor. Do you think that is what is happening today?

The worldwide climate crisis meeting is ending today in Glasgow. You might ask Greta Thunberg if that meeting has shown due concern for widows and orphans?

Our congress has been arguing about legislation and costs to improve the infrastructure, health coverage, education, family assistance and quality of life of all citizens. Do you think they have shown concern for widows and orphans?

What has been happening in our affluent country when travelers assault flight attendants; diners attack restaurant waiters; students hit school principals? Have we lost the humility to know we are all widows and orphans? Maybe people don't know who they are.

Pope Francis has demonstrated time after time his concern for the poor and marginalized. In Rome, in his travels, he has reached out to those on the periphery of society. And, yes, he has also recognized that all of us have been upended by the pandemic and the uncertainty of so much in life. It seems that so many people are adrift. We could learn a lot from the graciousness and generosity of today's scriptural widows.

Three days ago Francis celebrated the annual Mass for the cardinals and bishops who have died in the last twelve months – seventeen cardinals and 174 other bishops.

In his homily at this Mass the Pope recognized those who died of the COVID virus. Then he moved on to discuss other viruses of a more spiritual nature that can afflict even the so-called teachers of the faith – and, indeed, all of us, - when faced with life's difficulties and problems, especially the last and greatest virus of death. He then mentioned some of these spiritual viruses – irritability, despondence, impatience, sadness, aggressiveness, excessive complaining, loss of hope in God and, of course, bitterness.

Pope Francis is like a widow who is often alone and dismissed, yet, at almost 85, remains full of hope and joy. In his homily he went on to say, “Let us ask for the grace to look at adversity with different eyes. Let us ask for the strength to be able to live with it in meek and trusting silence that waits for the salvation of the Lord, without complaining, without grumbling, without being saddened. Now more than ever it is useless to shout, to stir up noise, to become bitter. What’s needed is for each of us to bear witness with our lives to our faith, which is a docile and hopeful waiting.”

I’d like to share a story of a young Jesuit priest who went to work with Mother Teresa in caring for the dying in Calcutta. He did not find it easy. When he asked Teresa how she stayed at this work, she replied: “The greatest need in life is trust; the absence of love is the greatest poverty, and the Eucharist is not only the center of our worship, but also the center of our concern for the poor. These are the three sustaining things in my life.”

What sustains me in time of difficulty and crisis? I hope I can recognize that I am a widow and orphan. I hope I know who I am and not try to be anyone else. I hope I accept my own poverty and my reliance on God and others. I hope I can always be as generous as the two widows we encounter today. Thank you, brave women, for your example. You are truly people that model Jesus for me.

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