



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-November 7th 2021

***Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16, Psalm 145, Hebrews 9: 24-28,
Mark 12:38-44***

Those of you who watch ‘Match of the Day’ or ‘Formula I Highlights’ will be aware that, fascinating as these may be, the minutiae and the chance to reflect in forensic detail and in slo-mo, they can never compare with being there or watching live. Because watching live and enduring every agonising moment is only possible because the result is uncertain. It can be the same sometimes with familiar Bible stories. We know the result. The tension is gone. We are relaxed voyeurs rather than fully engaged. So, it’s important to get back into the context of the lives of those in the story. Those for whom the result is not yet known and who, therefore, live by faith. Elijah, the great prophet as we now know him, proclaims a drought on Israel from God for the wickedness of the King, Ahab, and his appalling pagan queen. It gets so bad that even the wadi where Elijah hides dries up and he flees, ironically, to the territory of Sidon – the kingdom from which the dreaded queen, Jezebel, came. Smart move by God. Who would have thought to look for Elijah in enemy territory? But Sidon is not immune to the drought. Elijah pitches up, as God directs him, at the dwelling of a widow and her only son. She is gathering a few sticks to light the last fire to bake the last loaf she and her starveling boy will eat before dying. If you want a visual aid, think

Ethiopia in the 1980s, emaciated kids, flies, and fatalism in the eyes of all. Does she know who he is? Does she know that he is an enemy of the State? Does she understand that all this is his fault and the fault of that wretched Hebrew God? The Bible does not tell us.

All we are told is that God has promised to feed him by this unlikely source and so he asks her- ridiculous request - for food in the midst of famine. She has, she tells him, enough for one last meal before they die – a sort of viaticum. That will be fine, Elijah assures her. Make his loaf first and then she and the boy can have what's left. And astonishingly, instead of telling him to sling his hook, she does just that. In the face of disaster and tragedy and death, of the elimination of all that she has held dear, all that remains, the widow's sense of the duty of hospitality and the supervening work of mercy trumps all else. What she has, she will give – even unto the end. The upshot is, as we who are privileged to watch the highlights on the recording, the Bible, know, the widow is saved, and her son is saved – later he is indeed to be raised from the dead – *and* thence and thus the supply of bread never fails.

I can't quite put my finger on it but there is something vaguely familiar about this story of a woman who gives her all in obedience to the messenger -borne Word of God, whose son is the sacrifice and whose self-same son is raised from the dead and, in whom, the supply of the bread of life never fails. When we fast-forward the best part of a thousand years to Jesus' observation at the Temple treasury of the poor widow, we are reminded, powerfully and painfully of the Sidonian widow and the Nazarene mother and that, while generosity is good, total sacrifice is the key to salvation. No-one will ever give as much as the widow with her mite because she gives her all, everything that God has given her. Similarly – and on a much greater scale - on what will be the stage of the whole world, no-one will ever put in as much as the widow at the foot of the Cross. Only her obedience to the demands of the Word, her costly and sacrificial hospitality to the messenger-borne Word of God

incarnate, make possible, for all mankind, the viaticum, the Bread of Eternal Life, and the Chalice of Salvation. Only her act of total self-giving to, for and in the Temple, the place which houses the very Presence of God, sight unseen, the supreme act of faith, ensures by her generous hospitality, the bread for the journey and the ultimate survival of those of us about to die.