

- Our readings today present us with two remarkable women of faith. In our first reading we hear of the widow of Zarephath who, with her young son, is facing starvation.
- Down to her last cupful of flour and draught of oil, she's preparing to make one last meal for her son and herself, when she's approached by the prophet Elijah, who very remarkably asks her to make him something to eat before making anything for herself and her son.
- Can you imagine the faith this woman had to exert to share her food as Elijah proposed?
- Then, in today's Gospel we hear of the widow who puts her whole livelihood into the Temple treasury. Down to her last bit of money, this faithful woman gives it all to God – perhaps as a means of fully entrusting herself to Him in preparation for death.
- By their heroic and faithful actions, these poor widows are models for us of how we should steward our own personal resources in order to entrust ourselves to God.
- Giving ourselves to our Lord can take many forms. We give ourselves to Him most importantly by uniting ourselves to Him in prayer. We give ourselves to Him through our obedience to His laws and commandments, which are safeguarded by His Church.
- We give ourselves to God by living our Catholic faith with integrity and by practicing the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. But we also give ourselves to our Lord through the stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure.
- Our readings today teach us two things about giving to the Lord. The first lesson that we learn about our giving to God is that God expects our giving to Him to require some measure of sacrifice. It should pinch a bit.
- In today's Gospel we find Jesus seated near the treasury, observing how the different people make their contributions.
- Even though some wealthy people were putting in large sums of money, He wasn't impressed because they were giving of their surplus wealth. He knew they had the money to spare and that they weren't really making a sacrifice.
- In Christ's mind the wealthy were only doing their duty by giving large sums of money. There was nothing meritorious about their actions for they were simply fulfilling the obligation expected of them.
- But the widow who put in two small coins gave all she had. She was willing to sacrifice and forfeit all that she had as an act of faith. In this action she was placing herself entirely into the hands of the Lord.
- While perhaps our Lord doesn't expect us to give Him all our money, He does desire that we give in such a way that it requires an act of faith on our part. He wants our giving to be sacrificial so that we have to rely on Him.
- The second thing we learn from the readings today about giving to God is that God always blesses us when we are generous to Him.
- In the story of Elijah and the poor widow of Zarephath, Elijah asks to be given food and water. And even though she has very little left and is in fear of starving to death, she gives what she has to Elijah.
- And in return her jar of flour does not run empty nor does her jug of oil run dry for a year!
- The point is that we cannot outdo God in generosity! The more we give of ourselves to Him, the more He gives back to us in return.

- Thus, today's readings encourage us to consider how we give to the Lord. From a financial point of view, the first question we must ask is whether or not we are tithing as we should.
- The Catholic tradition is that we should give 10% of our gross income back to God in the form of donations made to our parish and other charities. That's what is expected of us.
- Unfortunately, most people do not give that much, and if you're one of those people who doesn't, do not lose heart. My best advice to you is to set 10% as a goal and work up over the course of a few years.
- If you're currently giving 3% of your income this year, next year try to do 4%. If you're giving 5%, next year try to give 6%. The point is that God calls us to give back as an act of faith in Him, and thus we should make every effort to sacrifice and do His will.
- But know as well, my friends, that God will bless you for your efforts! I've heard many stories over the years of how our Lord has taken care of families who tithe. So give with a cheerful heart, for our Lord will not leave you bereft if you place your trust in Him.
- I do recognize that you are often asked to give to various projects. During my tenure as your pastor, we've built the new church, decorated it with beautiful art, renovated the Allen Center, repaved the parking lot, built the grotto, and spent a lot of money helping the poor.
- As you heard at the beginning of Mass, we're now taking on responsibility for helping a sister parish devastated by Hurricane Helene, while some of you are also helping with the renovation of our school.
- Furthermore, when we surveyed you this past spring about what you'd like to see for our parish, you indicated more staffing and programming, not to mention more building space. As we're now adding staff and programming, our operating budget this year is a bit tight.
- So far this fiscal year (which began July 1), we are running a bit of a deficit in our operating budget, and we're still behind on our DSA collection.
- But I'm not here just to "shake you down" for more money. The point I really want to drive home is that your giving of time, talent, and treasure must be an act of faith.
- Giving back to God is not simply a financial decision to make, like planning for your kid's college education. Giving to God is a statement of faith.
- So, next Sunday we are going to relaunch our annual Stewardship Sunday, where we'll each take a moment to make a pledge of the time, talent, and treasure we'll be committing to our parish. So, I ask each of you to pray about this in the upcoming week.
- My goal is for all of us to give prudently, generously, and faithfully.
- Like the poor widow in today's Gospel, we must be willing to sacrifice and take the step of faith to give God all we can, trusting that He will provide for our needs.
- In closing, I'd like to thank all of you for your generosity to this parish. We are a growing parish with a lot of needs, and we need help both financially and with volunteers for our ministries. Yet, this parish has always risen to the occasion when we've had needs to fill.
- And if we all step out in faith as we give of our time, talent, and treasure to St. Ann's, our Lord will bless us abundantly. May our Lord, who is the giver of all good gifts, bless and keep us all!