

PASTORAL REFLECTION FOR NOVEMBER 7, 2021
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time and Racial Justice Sunday
This widow has put in more than all the others.

The world's need is as large as the oceans, and unless you're running the Gates Foundation, you probably feel your contribution to that need is pretty inconsequential. You send in your five dollars to feed the hungry. You make COVID masks for those who can't afford to buy them. You gather supplies for refugees from Haiti or Afghanistan. And still there are raging fires devouring neighborhoods, hurricanes and floods blowing and washing hundreds of people out of their homes, thousands of homeless, and COVID break through cases everywhere. It's so overwhelming that we wonder what difference it makes whether we act or not?

But Mother Teresa once said that even in a city where millions are dying on the sidewalk, we have a duty to pick up just one. We do what we can. The prophet Elijah, who in this week's first reading has run away from threats and prayed for death when the going got tough, is pretty amazing in other ways. He fully accepts that God can take a handful of flour and a dab of oil and keep a family alive indefinitely. If, like the widows of today's first reading and Gospel, we can share what little we have, we have only to remember what Jesus did with five loaves and two fish. And who can measure what the gift of just a dab of hope, courage or friendship can do when God is present to multiply it in the giving?

This week end (and for the week or two that follows) we have the annual collection for Sisters and Order Priests and Brothers, and it is one place where you CAN make a big difference! While most Catholics think that the Church takes care of Religious when they retire, this is a myth. There are retirement programs in place for diocesan priests, but not for religious who have served the Church most of their lives for very little recompense. In my early days, we received about \$40 per month, and I have never received a professional salary. Most sisters at one time or another have been in positions where they waited until the lay employees in their schools and hospitals were paid; and then if there was enough, the sisters received their "stipends". Sometimes there was not enough. Consequently, we were not able to accumulate much reserve and many religious orders have come to retirement years underfunded. This one and only collection is managed by the National Religious Retirement Office . Part of it is returned to the religious communities according to how many sisters, priests or brothers served for how many years in a given diocese. The rest of it is made available in grant funds for which religious communities can apply for needs that they cannot fund on their own. In some dioceses, because it is so generous, part of this collection is taken out and held back for diocesan priests before the rest is sent in to the NRRO, but I can assure you this does not happen in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. We receive all of your gifts, and we are very grateful.

Sr. Chabanel Mathison, O.S.U.