

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes  
Santa Barbara, CA**

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B – November 10, 2012

**Harriet Burke**

Reflections on **1 Kings 17:10-16; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44**

**W**hat a wonderful collection of people we have presented to us today: widows, prophets and scribes.

The two widows act in a way that I would think most of us would not even consider.

In the first reading, the widow is from Zarephath, an area that was suffering severe drought. If we were in her situation and someone asked us for the last bit of food in our cupboard, we would probably feed our loved ones first!

Elijah was a Jew; the widow was a Gentile. Yet there was something in him that she was drawn to. She wanted to believe this unlikely prophet, when he told her that neither flour nor the oil would run dry until rain came to the land.” What astounding trust!

The widow in the gospel of Mark is also a bit of a conundrum. We have just heard Jesus say, “Beware of the religious leaders, the scribes,” who like to walk about in long robes, loving and inviting attention; even making a show with their pious prayer.

The scribes were not bad people; they were well educated in the law and were committed to doing their work for no pay. Over the years though, people began to give them gifts and treat them special, so much so that the religious leaders began to expect praise and to enjoy the compensation.

I wonder who the prophets were for the widow in the gospel. Was she so on the fringes of society that she was unaware of the corruption that Jesus had talked about? If she was aware, would she have put in her last two coins?

One of the commentaries I found fascinating suggested that Jesus, in his role as a religious reformer, is not praising the widow for her blind trust but rather is lamenting the unethical system that encouraged widows to give up their meager resources!

Either way, the two women did trust and gave everything. Therein lies their power, says Joan Chittister: they had nothing to lose, which made them completely free.

Since I am a widow, I was pleased to be the one invited to give the homily today. Since we are a church so connected to social justice issues, I would normally talk about the many places in our world that treat widows in a reprehensible way.

But I hope you will indulge me if I choose to talk about widows locally, in our Beatitudes community and in the Santa Barbara area. We are not destitute or voiceless as the two women today, yet it seems we have a bond, a connection—maybe even a sense of being on the margins. In the past few weeks I asked a few women and men what it meant for them to be a widow or widower.

Almost all spoke of loneliness; others talked of missing having someone to talk with about important decisions and issues; and still others mentioned how they missed being held and comforted in both the good times and bad.

After Chuck’s death, I wrote a book for my children reflecting on remembrances of his life.

It’s full of stories not only of walking with Chuck during his dying but also after his death, recalling how present he seemed to me. Friends and family were so kind, and I could

see the hand of God in almost everything that happened around me.

My grief was full of startling and stunning events. That was over six years ago.

Two years ago things became different. I realized that my prayer life had become very stale. Where before I had found insights, peace and solace in contemplation, I could hardly sit for any time at all without great distractions and wishing I could be off doing other things – *any* other things. I figured that for now, this must be as good as it is going to get, and I would hold on for wherever this ride was taking me.

A month ago Paul R. Smith came to [Word and Life](#). He is the author of the book *Integral Christianity*, which we studied this fall. When he came, I had only scanned the first part of the book, where Smith examines the many stages of growth in a person using the perspectives of Ken Wilber. It was fascinating in a sociological way, but I wasn't really taken with it.

So at Word and Life that day I was unprepared for the words of Paul Smith, whom I was thinking of as a scribe, a religious leader—a good man, but with lots of heady stuff to say. For years he had been a Southern Baptist Minister and he is still a minister of The Broadway Church in Kansas City, Missouri. In my arrogance, I thought it was unlikely he would have much to say to me.

He ended up being a very down-to-earth person. I was intrigued with his presentation especially when he talked about the three faces of God – The Trinity but in a very different way: What we would think of as God the Father, he suggested might be called the *God we talk about*, the *Infinite God*—the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

Jesus, our brother, he said is *the one we talk with* – *the Intimate God*. He described sitting across from Jesus in prayer and having a conversation—both talking and listening. Even

asking the question, “What have you got for me today, Jesus?”

And what we would call Spirit is the divine within—*The Inner Face* of God—the God in each and every one of us. It's knowing God is the light of the world, but “so are we,” and we speak and act as God. I was absolutely fascinated with his concept and the blessing that went along with it.

I wondered if in the last two years, in attempting to stay connected with Chuck, most of my prayers were “out there” in the cosmos with the *Infinite God*. It hadn't occurred to me that I wasn't connecting with the Jesus sitting with me or within me.

I began using Paul Smith's idea for my prayer time. The change and richness has been astounding. Now I can't wait to have my prayer time each day; to sit in quiet and be touched by whatever comes to me. The drought has gone.

So how do I—how do we—connect with these two Biblical widows today? For me it seems widows are a symbol of people in transition, someone tossed into a change. When events like this happen, we have two choices: we can fight it, resist it, or we can embrace it and see it as an opportunity to evolve in our spirituality and practice. Is there a transition being called forth in your life?

And I am touched by the idea of the unlikely prophet. Elijah was unlikely for the widow of Zarephath. Paul Smith was certainly an unlikely prophet for me, thank God.

Are there unlikely prophets in your life you need to revisit? Someone who has said something that has stuck with you, but you haven't fully grappled with it?

Do you see *yourself* as an unlikely prophet? What truths are you holding voiceless inside that need to be spoken?

Let us take a few moments of quiet with our Inner God, our light with in, and ponder these questions.