

- The analogy used most often in Sacred Scripture to describe the love God has for us is marriage. Our relationship with God is a covenantal relationship; it's a mutual exchange of one's whole self that begins at our baptism.
- Just as a husband and wife give themselves fully to one another in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, so too does God give Himself fully to us.
- We see this especially in the sacraments, most particularly in Holy Communion in which Christ gives Himself to us: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. We hear about this today in our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.
- Unlike the high priests of old who would enter the Holy of Holies each year to make sacrifice with blood that was not His own, our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal high priest, has made an offering of His very self for our sakes.
- Christ gives Himself fully for us so that we might be freed from our sins and one day enjoy the eternal reward of Heaven.
- Our baptism is our pledge to live in communion with God, to accept Christ's gift of Himself and to live in His love. In baptism we make the promise to place Christ at the center of our lives and to give ourselves fully to Him.
- 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 gift 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 hear the story of the widow's mite. Jesus has been teaching the crowds and He is seated near the treasury and begins observing how the different people put money into the treasury.
- 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 of 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 reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings we hear the story of Elijah the prophet 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 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%. 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 know that lately it's been tough for many of you to give as you'd like. Some of you are unemployed or underemployed. For others of you your business has dropped off because of the economic situation our country is going through.
- I also recognize that as a parish we've been asking a lot of you lately with the building campaign. And in addition to money for the campaign, we also need to be cognizant of the fact that our operating budget this year is extremely tight.
- In fact, in the last fiscal year (which ended June 30), we had a deficit of over \$50,000. And while our cash flow is positive right now, we're barely paying our bills right now as a parish. And so if you can give more, I ask you earnestly to please do so.
- But whether you can or cannot give more right now, what I want you to understand is that giving back to God is not simply a financial decision to make, like planning for your kid's college education.
- Giving to God is also a statement of faith. And 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. Things are tight right now and we have a debt to pay off, but if we all step out in faith as we give to the parish, our Lord will bless us abundantly.
- May our Lord, who is the giver of all good gifts, bless and keep us all!