

## 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Eleven is the number of the apostles left after the death of Judas. Eleven heard the news of the resurrection from the women at the tomb and the pilgrims to Emmaus (Luke 24:09, 33). Eleven witnessed the Ascension of Jesus (Matthew 28:16, Mark 16:14), and eleven chose Matthias to round their number back up to twelve (Acts 1:26). Eleven has a feeling of incompleteness.

Today we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month when there went into effect the World War I armistice ending the fighting between the Allies and the Germans on land, sea and air. The armistice left some matters incomplete. The peace took several more months to negotiate, so the end of the war came in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles.

The war ended, but of course people had to live with its consequences. On a social level, it had a tremendous impact on women. Statistics vary, but let's say over 9 million soldiers died or went missing in the war. Of them about a third were married, leaving behind well over three million widows worldwide with - on average - two children each.

Good people naturally care for someone who has suffered a loss, especially something unjust, like the untimely death of a spouse. Compassion for the widow and the orphan is a law in the bible, but a law that comes first from the human heart. Of course, we want to help those who suffer; of course we want to aid fatherless or motherless children.

Today the "battlefield" includes not only countries at war but also untamed domestic violence by Americans on Americans, whether physical abuse in the home or the shootings of youth in a California bar. Domestic violence creates domestic widows.

Today's gospel features a widow who has suffered not only the loss of a husband but also the loss of the justice she deserves. Jesus said scribes "devour the houses of widows." The woman had little to give partly because of greedy public religious officials who left her insecure.

As a setup, the lectionary offers us Psalm 146, which names various traits of God that we would also expect from a righteous person: the Lord "does justice to those who are oppressed," "gives bread to the hungry," "sets prisoners free," "opens the eyes of the blind," "raises up those bowed down," "protects the stranger," and in a verse that explains why we sing this psalm today, "The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the path of the wicked."

The national World War I museum is just down the road from this cathedral. The United States World War I Centennial Commission has invited people throughout the country to toll bells at 11 am on 11/11, and this cathedral is participating. This tolling remembers those who served in World War I. These aren't especially bells of victory. We toll the same bells at funerals to honor the dead, mourn their loss, and express solidarity with those left behind.

We sometimes feel powerless to stop violence in our country, but we have power to support those who have suffered loss. In those acts of compassion we are already demonstrating that describing this world as violent is as incomplete as the number eleven. When guns have ceased their fire, peace survives.

Sunday, November 11, 2018