**24 Pentecost, Nov. 8, 2015; Ruth 3:1-17; Ps 127; Heb 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44; Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Sacrifice: the theme for today. The word sacrifice, if you are a baseball fan, brings up a specific image. In baseball, a sacrifice is when a batter either intentionally bunts or hits a high fly ball -- all for the purpose of getting the man on first base to advance. This batter gains nothing personally from this action, as he gets an out and it does not improve his batting average. And it is risky, for it may not work out the way he plans! And yet, he does it for the good of the team. This is a sacrifice, indeed.

The word "sacrifice" comes from Latin, originally meaning to perform sacred rites to please the gods. Nowadays, "sacrifice" means to give something up for the sake of a better cause. Modern day sacrifice includes parents who give up their time and sleep to care for their children or a person stays up all night to serve as a volunteer at the Warming Shelter. Another example are those who serve in the Armed Forces. Today, we give thanks for our Veterans; Veterans Day is this coming Wednesday. Our veterans today are like Senior Airman Vanessa Velez, who deployed to Afghanistan three times. In Afghanistan, she drives convoys in a Humvee...one of the most dangerous jobs in that region. She has completed more than 120 convoys into enemy territory. She says she gets immense job satisfaction from constantly thinking about all of the people's lives she has in her hands while she is driving her vehicle. So far, she's kept all of her passengers safe. To Airman Velez, a true veteran hero, it's all in days work. To us, it is sacrifice.

Sacrifice includes surrender of something that is prized; synonyms are "relinquish" and "forego." The word "sacrifice" is not popular nowadays as most of us don't want to make sacrifices; our culture is "me-centered." The media sends us messages to us to get all we can get for ourselves, keeping ourselves at the center. That old Frank Sinatra song entitled, "My Way" still holds true for many. The lyrics include: "I've lived a life that's full, I've traveled each and every highway, But more, much more than this I did it my way. I planned each charted course, Each careful step along the byway, And more, much more than this, I did it my way." We want to do things our way, but often that way is full of pride and self-centeredness, not sacrifice. This is not the way that God wants us, His children, to live.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches about sacrifice-and it is not an easy lesson. It begins with talk of the scribes and the rich people, but this is confusing -- as the scribes live lives dedicated to their religion and the rich people give generously to the work of God in the temple. So, what is the problem here? Why does Jesus speak so negatively about both the scribes and the rich folks? It is because of what is in their hearts, it is because of how they live, it is because of their pride and hypocrisy. They give the appearance of being generous to others who are watching, but in their hearts they are choosing the self-centered "my way" life. Jesus contrasts them with the widow, who is there in the temple as well -- and she "***put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.***" Jesus says, "***Truly I tell you, this*** ***poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury....out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on***." Jesus' teaching here has to do with our whole self, and what we are holding back from Him. We understand holding back, don't we? It's safer to hold something of ourselves back. We don't like to risk. Jesus holds up the poor widow as a hero, as a model for us to follow -- because she gives all of herself, and does not hold back; she is "all in." She trusts God with her whole self, and her giving was an act of worship: gratitude to God. For the rich, their giving was about pride. They had no gratitude to God for their wealth. She gave everything she had for the work of God's kingdom on earth, this was her devotion to God, her gesture of love. Oh she sacrificed, but she was joyful because it was about her love of God; it was an act of joy for her.

Remember the Alamo in San Antonio? At the Alamo, before the big fight, the noble young commander William Travis draws the line in the dirt with his boot. He invites all who will stay and fight with him to cross the line and join him. I don't know if you remember when Bishop Matt was here for Confirmation in March, but he shared with those who were confirmed about how the decision to be confirmed is like this line in the dirt.

Our decision to follow Jesus is like a line in the dirt: we are on one side or the other, but we can't straddle the line, we can't hold back part of ourselves from the Lord. God wants us to be all in, to not keep back part of ourselves. Did you notice that the word "all" appears three times just in the last two sentences of this Gospel? Are We "All In," Like the Widow Who Gave Everything?

How do we do this? How do we have our hearts so turned to God, like the widow did? We do it through development of holy habits, and it takes time, intentionality, practice.....just like anything else that we set our minds to do, to learn how to do. In the Christian church's tradition, a collection of holy habits, or spiritual practices, is called a "rule of life." Bishop Matt has given the Diocese a rule of life, which are five holy habits: weekly attendance of the Eucharist, prayer, fasting, sabbath, and daily examen (copies, with details, are in the Hall and on the Diocesan website). Sure, keeping this Rule of Life will involve sacrifice -- doing these things takes time, but oh my-- the pay off is immeasurably wonderful. And, it's not about getting it perfect. It's not about earning our way into God's heart, because we are already there; God loves us completely now! It is about developing holy habits so that we might become more faithful followers of Christ.

The ultimate in sacrifice is Jesus. In our reading from Hebrews, we are reminded that Jesus' actions in coming to earth and on the cross were "***on our behalf.***" He "***remov(ed)*** ***sin by the sacrifice of himself***" and came "***to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him***." Jesus gave His life, out of love for us.

In a few minutes, we will all be reaffirming our faith by singing words of the Creed. These are "**all in**" words of sacrifice and love. These words put us on the side of the line where Jesus is....so today, like never before, say those words with a deeper understanding of your faith. Jesus wants you to be "**all in**" with Him. Amen.