



3. March 2026
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT
Day 14: “The First Place for the Lord”

In today's reading (1 Kings 17:8–16), we again meet the prophet Elijah, whom God sends to Zarephath, where He had commanded a widow to feed him (v. 9). When Elijah finds her gathering wood at the city gate, he asks her to bring him water and a morsel of bread. The poor widow replies: *“As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse; and now, I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die”* (v. 12).

Nevertheless, Elijah encourages her to do as he has told her: first bring him a small loaf of bread, and then make one for herself and her son (v. 13). He assures her: *“thus says the Lord the God of Israel, ‘The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth’* (v. 14).

The widow does as Elijah tells her, believing his words, and what he predicted comes true to the letter. To listen to a true prophet such as Elijah is to listen to the voice of God. That is what the widow did, and as a reward, God ensured that she had enough food to keep herself and her son alive. She obeyed Elijah's request even though her situation was desperate. From a human point of view, it would have been understandable if she had refused his request in order to preserve the little she had for herself and her son.

But this passage teaches us that we must always give priority to God, even—and especially—when our own need is great. If we trust in Him, the Lord will always show us a way out, even when we see none. In such situations, trust is the key that allows God to act, for He knows our circumstances and will bring everything to a good end.

In today's Gospel (Mt 23:1–12), Jesus points out the discrepancy between the teachings and the actions of the Pharisees and scribes, and He teaches us how to deal with such inconsistency: *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice”* (vv. 2–3).

How can we apply this distinction today as disciples of the Lord? Our Catholic Church has been entrusted with the great treasure of authentic doctrine, whose dogmas are infallible. These are the unchanging point of reference for the faithful. If anyone were

to teach something contrary to this—even if they were the “scribes and Pharisees” of our day—they could not demand obedience. In this regard, St. Paul speaks forcefully: *“Not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.”* (Gal 1:7–9)

The faithful should not allow themselves to be confused by false teachings or by a way of life inconsistent with the doctrine that is preached. All true authority comes from God, and only those who adhere to sound doctrine and live according to it are worthy of the authority entrusted to them. Jesus even points out that we have only one Teacher—Himself (Mt 23:8)—and only one Father: our heavenly Father (v. 9). When in the Church we address priests as “father,” we always keep in mind that this spiritual fatherhood is rooted in God and comes from Him, not from the minister’s own greatness or authority.

The Lord concludes today’s passage by saying: *“He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* (vv. 11–12). This essential warning is the antidote to pride, which so easily finds its way into the human heart and was the cause of Lucifer’s fall. This angel did not want to serve or submit to God or His designs. As a fallen angel, he continues to this day to try to establish his dominion over human beings and the world. Pride is an ideal means of seducing human beings, who seek to be great, distancing them from God and causing them to exalt themselves.

Jesus does not criticize the fact that man aspires to greatness. Rather, He shows us what true greatness consists of: humble service to God, who is our Father, seeking to fulfill His will; and service to the brothers and sisters whom the Lord places on our path. It is here that true greatness unfolds, for when we submit ourselves to God, His majesty can shine forth in our lives. Let us remember that the Lord washed the feet of His disciples (Jn 13:4–5), He who is the Master and the Lord.

Thus, as flowers from today’s meditation, we can gather the following resolutions:

Trust in God in all situations, giving Him first place in our lives. Remain faithful to the sound doctrine of the Church and live according to it. Overcome the temptations of pride by serving God and our neighbor.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/15/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/a-lesson-in-humility/>