

St Pius & St Anthony 32nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

Our Diocese's previous bishop, Bishop McRaith, God rest his soul, he loved to preach on the theme of stewardship, or what he called good and generous giving, the sacrificial offering of gifts for God's glory (*true giving is a worshipful act to God*). Bishop McRaith was a farmer at heart, and one story (of many) he loved to tell, was a version of animal farm, where the barnyard animals wanted to thank their farmer-keeper for his care of them, and do something special to celebrate his birthday. At a barn council meeting, the chickens suggested they hold a nice meal, having a great country breakfast of bacon and eggs. But the pigs spoke up against it, saying, "Hold on, we are not comfortable with that menu, that would cost us a whole lot more!" Their sacrifices are very different, what is an egg given by a chicken compared to the very meat of the pigs! They would **feel** their sacrifice a lot more than those chickens.

Our gospel today is a great study in contrasts when it comes to sacrificial giving (different levels of it—the scribe versus the widow). Some may give and it mean nothing, because it is only leftovers and excess to them, while others may give, more sacrificially (their own skin). Among this contrast, Jesus commends that more heart felt giving (or when we say we feel the pinch in the pocketbook). The overall amount – the quantity - is irrelevant to God. It's the proportion of one's resources and the personal investment in the sacrifice that makes it good to God. Jesus announces that the widow 'outgives' everyone that day in the Temple.

It takes Jesus, to show this to us: How many times have we heard the saying, "*If you wouldn't have said anything, I never would have noticed?*" That certainly applies to our reading today. If Jesus hadn't said anything that day about the widow, nobody would ever have noticed the little woman and her little giving to the Treasury. But, that is our Jesus. He notices. He points out the poor to us, and He lifts up the lowly.

And what a contrast (of a good disciple and a bad disciple) Jesus highlights today between the widow and the scribes. First, Jesus singles out the scribes (who notice that He says will receive a '*very severe condemnation*'-Mk 12:40-) They are the flashy attention-seeking ones, with their long robes (be assured they are not working, dressed in the garb of long, ornate robes), they want recognition at events (honorable mentions-a star, brownie points, special crowns), they want the honor seats at banquets, (special parking places & spots at the head table). The scribes eat that selfish stuff up (notice Jesus condemned them saying, "They 'devour' widow's homes Mk 12:40). They are always talking about themselves,

Jesus says they 'love reciting lengthy prayers' (12:40), that is, hearing themselves talk – commanding the stage – they have to be in the center of things).

(Well again, God notices, we have to keep that in mind).

Then, contrast the scribes with the poor-little lady coming to give her 'two cents'. How do we know she was poor. Likely, it was shown by her humble, common way of dressing (not like the glittering scribe). She was in plain, worn clothing, that announced her active domestic work even as an older widow (so unlike the scribe). She slips into the Temple area, unnoticed, and deposits unheard, her meager contribution into the box with no attention (remember that Jesus had called out Scribe-Pharisees elsewhere in Matt 6:2, that they like to blow trumpets to announce their giving, maybe calling a press conference to give away a dime, and they demand a plaque naming them in the golden donors club (I imagine them dropping in \$100 in change into a metal bucket to make the most clanging sound, drawing attention to their gift! *(In the Greek, the reading says the wealthy 'cast' (v 41) their contributions, while she 'gave' (v 42). Why different word unless they 'threw' with force to make the greater sound effect!?)*)

Yet that day, the poor widow, gets the praise and commendation from Jesus. She is unnamed, but good for her on that point, she wasn't doing it to be recognized. She did it because she loved God and wanted to offer all she could. She knew that all she had, was given her by God. God took care of her, he gave it to her once, so she gave in kind to others, and trusted God would take care of her again (give back to her again). What Jesus is pointing out about her, makes me think she wasn't just dropping off her tithe. No she remained a moment in a corner of the Temple to pray silently, thanking God for His care of her. And then she didn't retreat back to her home, but I can see her going next to give to her neighbors too, as only the poor can. I bet she delivered a baled loaf of bread to a grieving neighbor who just had a death in the family, or went to do housework for a neighbor widow who was sick in bed. She embodied what Jesus just taught last week, summarizing the religious law, to be 'Love of God' and 'Love of Neighbor'.

I like to point out where this reading falls in the progression of Mark's writing. Last week those two Great commandments of God taught by Jesus. Love God and Love Neighbor. And right after today's episode in the Temple, Jesus will prophesy the ***destruction of the Temple*** (Mk 13:1-2). We can guess why the Temple is destroyed. Its corruption – the scribes (The Establishment -Pharisees Sadducees, Priests are consuming it-They are cannibalizing religion as predators. Glorifying-serving themselves, they are tearing it down (recall Jesus condemned the scribes for '***devouring***' the homes of widows- Temple-Mk 12:40)

What adds to the sacrificially generous widow woman's giving (*remember it is not the quantity of the donation that matters to God, but how much it is felt by the giver*), but what makes her gift so blessed is due to her 'status' in society. She was 'nobody', was considered powerless socially, what we call 'at risk' population--dependent either on some fixed income from family, or direct aid herself from her religion. Interestingly, there was a 'charity system' within Temple Life, a safety net program written into Mosaic Law for Hebrews, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, dictated that every third year, the Temple tithes were set aside to charity (food & basics) for vulnerable populations, 'resident aliens, orphans and WIDOWS' (Deut 24:19-21). Also, the Old Testament named Widows as beneficiaries of what they called the 'gleaning laws' (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22, Ruth 2) where farmers were to leave some produce unharvested in their fields, maybe the extra outer rows untouched, of fields so fruits could be picked up by widows, orphans or foreigners.

Further, I notice that one of the first systematic developments among those first Christians found in the Acts of the Apostles (after the executive decision of apostles and holy spirit of a successor replacement for Judas), was the establishment of a more efficient 'bread distribution' network for hungry 'widows' (specifically the Hellenist-foreign widows-the program was administered by the 'Deacons' Acts 6:1-7) So, widows, (orphans & foreigners) are closest to the heart of God, and Jesus certainly celebrates this one today - a loving, giving, sharing, caring woman, model disciple who fulfills the great commands of loving God and loving Neighbor. May we be as big-hearted a disciple of Jesus, as she was, always generous and open to helping others to the point of 'feeling' it!