

[Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Ps. 146; Heb. 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44]

Alice Camille is a religious educator, scripture commentator, and author of many books. Including a weekly Sunday homily service, one of several which I use to prepare my homilies. She shares this memory, triggered by today's Gospel passage about the widow and her two coins.

What's the value of two grapefruits? If you've been to the supermarket lately, you might be able to come up with the cost in a dollar or two. If it's the off-season for citrus, you'll probably pay a bit more -- and not necessarily like what you get. But if you pay more than, say, \$5 for any piece of fruit, then you probably have enough money in your pocket not to care about the price of things at all. If you have that kind of fiscal leisure, and you give me an expensive piece of fruit, I'll happily eat it and be appreciative. But I won't think you gave out of your poverty.

Once, however, I received two pieces of grapefruit from the tree in a woman's yard. The tree was bowed heavily with fruit and it was indeed the season. The fruit, one could argue, was free for the taking, because God was primarily responsible for the yield. But because the tree grew behind the woman's house, it was her tree and she was selling the fruit -- a dozen grapefruit for a dollar! Even in season that's an extreme bargain, so I eagerly paid the dollar. Who wouldn't?

But you should have seen her house -- falling down, door broken, yard choked with unmown grass. And you should have seen the woman herself: elderly, crippled, clearly unable to keep up with the place and with no one to help her.

The sale of her fruit would buy her dinner -- or not. Cheap as it was, this was some of the most precious grapefruit in the world.

The woman took my dollar, and I bagged up the fruit, feeling like a criminal. When I'd chosen my 12 pieces, the woman reached up and plucked two more grapefruit and topped off my bag. "For your trouble," she said. I cried all the way home, clutching the holiest, and most expensive fruit since the Garden of Eden.

The Bible tells us that God is revealed in jars of flour that don't go empty, jugs of oil that never run dry. God is present in the widow who gives up her last two coins to the collection plate and a boy's lunch that winds up feeding a multitude. God can be found in thin wafers of bread and a sip of wine that won't resolve the average growling stomach but can provide everlasting life.

You may want to rationalize away some of these things, or perhaps you find it hard to believe even one of them. But I believe them all. And I believe one more: that God once gave me two pieces of grapefruit that I didn't pay for, to remind me that everything else in my life came free too. And God help me but I took it.

My friends, in giving her two coins, the widow gets nothing in return. There will be no invitation to a dinner honoring those who have donated. She will not get her name on a building in the Temple complex. And yet, it is the poor widow who has given everything. She has given her whole self in giving away all she has.

Remember that contestant on the game show "Jeopardy" who waged everything he had on a Daily Double question? James Holzhauer. He would push his hands away from him in a gesture that said, "I'm all in."

That's what donating the two coins to the Temple treasury symbolized. It means that the widow is "all in."

Jesus' observation of the widow has its roots in today's Old Testament First Reading. A widow gives drink and feeds Elijah. She has nothing. But through her generosity to a prophet of God, her flour and oil do not go dry for a year. She is "all in."

This is what God wants from us. God wants us to give not out of our surplus, but out of our basic sustenance. God doesn't want us to give away everything we have; but God does want us to DEDICATE everything we have received from Him to His greater glory. He wants us to be "all in" with our time, talent and treasure. With all that we have, and all that we are.

It's not what's on the outside that counts; it's what is happening on the inside. Where is my heart? What are my intentions? What do I treasure? Where is YOUR heart? What are YOU intentions? What do YOU treasure the most in life?

Among the many prayers I say every morning, the Prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola fits in with the theme of today's readings:

"Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will." The more He takes my memory, the older I get, the more I am forgetting things! Memory, understanding and will all deal with the mind. We choose what we remember, what we learn, and what we do.

"Take, Lord, receive all I have and possess. You have given all to me, now I return it. Take, Lord, receive all is your now. Dispose of it, only according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace; that's enough for me."

This means that we don't save any part of ourselves for a rainy day. The Kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurates requires us to spend our whole selves. And if we do, God will give us more.

We must hold nothing back. Our sorrows. Our joys. Our weakness. It must be offered back in love to God.

After all, on the cross, it is Jesus who gives out of His nothingness. Out of His pain, His suffering, His condemnation by men and women, He gives everything. Jesus is "all in."

He is the Great High Priest of the Letter to the Hebrews, Who sacrifices Himself once and for all.

Think of a time when someone did something for you that was totally unexpected. It's a wonderful feeling to get help when you really need it or to have someone do a huge favor for you. To receive assistance from another person also involves giving up control and depending on another. To have such an experience calls forth a profound sense of gratitude. That's what Jesus did for the world. He gave himself for others so that all may live. All you have to do is accept that offer.

This week, may all of us pray that, like the widow, we will be "all in" -- Old and young. Rich and poor. Are YOU "all in?" AMEN!