

St Pius-St Anthony 32nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

I must confess I feel a sting in the gospel today, as I hear Jesus put the scribes in place, mentioning those in long robes (who else around here is in a long robe?) And those with honor seats, as I think about the child who one time said to me, 'Why does your chair have a cushion and mine doesn't?' but also the 'lengthy prayer' part, so I do confess today's homily may be shorter. I'm listening!

I love how Jesus contrasts the scribes and their temple behavior with the humble little widow woman in the gospel. Jesus is so good, he always notices; he knows our hearts and takes individual effort to uphold each of God's beloved children. He knows and understands us and what a gift to be thankful for!

Jesus noticed the unrecognized, lowly simple widow in the gospel. Isn't that like him? A story is told about a regular beggar who always hung out on the same sidewalk, and a new family had moved into the apartment complex behind it, and one morning as the young father was leaving to go to work, he bumped into the street person on the sidewalk. The beggar said, "Can you spare any money to help?" The man goodheartedly responded that he would do what he could, but since he packed and carried his lunch to work, he might not have much money on him. He reached into his pocket and felt maybe a dollar in change in there, and so he was pulling it out and said, "*By the way, what is your name?*" And the beggar stepped back, looking puzzled but kept his hand out, and as the man dumped the change into the beggar's hand, the beggar kind-of pushed away, and said '**No, Sir, please keep your money-you have made my day.**' So many years I've been on this street and No one has ever asked for my name--my mom called me 'Franklin'. **You asking about me, you have given me more than you can imagine.**' Now, what a shock that the new apartment tenant just wanted to know as a person *who he was helping*, and the beggar just wanted to be recognized/shown dignity as a fellow person! **The beggar's heart was fed/warmed by just the interest and concern shown that his name was asked.** I think that opens an angle for us to appreciate anew today's gospel. How many people walked through the Temple area, dropping donations into the pot, and of them all that day, Jesus notices and celebrates the gift of the poor little widow woman! She who probably didn't know what she would eat the rest of the week, she gave what she could. What a precious spirit she has of giving, providing to others and trusting God to provide for her. It reminds me of the precious scenes of little kids' first Easter egg hunt when he/she is the smallest person on the scene and as the ribbon is cut to send the kids out retrieving eggs, that new littlest one reaches down and grabs an egg and places it in the basket of the person behind them. They are sharing already--thinking first of someone else--what a precious soul! Or I remember a lay Jesuit missionary I met one time who told me that she had worked in missions on the Marshall Islands among the poorest of the poor. She remarked how kind-spirited, generous and other-centered the villagers were that she worked among. She said

she had to be careful about how she talked with them, ***because they always wanted to give her stuff*** (She thought “I came here to help & give to you”!) She mentioned learning how to subtly compliment her women friends because if she would come right out and say, “Your earrings are beautiful-I love them” then the poor woman would take them off and say ‘Here, you wear/keep them....” She developed a way of saying, ‘Well, jewelry bothers my skin I’m sorry. And they are most beautiful and belong on you!”

I think of such generous and God-trusting souls, when I imagine this poor widow in the gospel today. And how Jesus lifts her up. Jesus knows and notices the real gift of the widow. Undoubtedly there were big gifts, corporate gifts maybe dumped into the basket, but Jesus who knows our hearts, he knows what is behind the gift, and which are true sacrificial gifts. She feels her gift, as she knows she just gave away her livelihood, ***but she has faith*** that the loving God who first entrusted her with the two coins, that God, is going to take care her again. She trusts that she has made it this far by God’s grace and He is going to bless her the rest of the way through life, as long as she keeps faith and helps spread/share even what little she has for the benefit of others too. That is genuine Christian giving; it doesn’t matter the size, great or small, it is whether it is given in a true trusting and sacrificial manner- a gift returned to God, because a person knows it first came from God. This raises the question of what we are offering God. Do we give to God, based on what we have left over, ***after we have served ourselves***, or do we give to God first and trust that He will continue to take care of us and all the rest of it. Another way of asking this, is “Do we give to God up front, or on the back end; do we pass him our scraps or our first best fruits? The whole Old Testament idea of giving God ***First Fruits (of one’s harvest)***, was that it was an act of faith, that if we acknowledged God up front--that everything we have and are, came from him, then everything else will fall into place for us. Of course, such giving is generosity, but deeper than that, it is trusting God; that if we serve God and look out for our neighbor, then we also will be provided for by God who gives to us all. Jesus celebrates the disposition of this widow woman. Unlike the greedy scribes that Jesus contrasts to her, she isn’t looking to getting anything out of anybody, she is simply wishing to give to everybody. What a trusting heart! Her act of trust and generosity is her act of worship that day in the Temple (unlike the lengthy pretext of wordy prayers, Jesus says the scribes offer), She trustingly offers praise to God, by returning to Him a gesture of faith in Him- giving to the temple treasury her little offering- but for her, it was her everything. And we can be assured that God notices. God who gave to her once, will give to her again, providing for her as she lives by and keeps trusting in Him. What an example of faith for us all to follow!