

NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 [1 KGS 17:10-16](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 146:7, 8-9, 9-10](#)

R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!

Reading 2 [HEB 9:24-28](#)

Gospel

[MK 12:41-44](#)

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

HOMILY:

The American industrialist, Henry Ford, was once asked to donate money for the construction of a new medical facility. The billionaire pledged to donate \$5,000. The next day in the newspaper, the headline read, "Henry Ford contributes \$50,000 to the local hospital." The irate Ford was on the phone immediately to complain to the fund-raiser that he had been misunderstood. The fund-raiser replied that they would print a retraction in the paper the following day to read, "Henry Ford reduces his donation by \$45,000." Realizing the poor publicity that would result, the industrialist agreed to the \$50,000 contribution in return for the following: That above the entrance to the hospital was to be carved the biblical inscription: "I came among you and you took me in." (cf. Matthew 25). The hospital indeed was created to "take in the sick"; Ford thought the fundraiser had "taken him in" in another way.

Taken in. Tricked! Hoodwinked into giving. Public shame—not exactly the best motivation for giving! What might be the deeper, purer motive for generosity? Jesus' teaching reveals that how we give is an important spiritual issue, one about which the poor widow holds the key. For she shows not just HOW we are to give, but WHY we are to give.

The most obvious aspect of Jesus' teaching on giving concerns HOW we are to give, that it is not the size of our gift that matters; instead, it is about how much of a sacrifice is required. If, for example, I give from what I really don't need, it's not a deep, pure gift. As Mother Teresa, now St. Teresa of Calcutta said, "If you give what you do not need, it isn't giving."

However, there is more to this example than just the small gift given out of scarcity. For this lesson not only touches HOW we are to give (it must be a sacrifice), but also WHY we are to give. *What was her motive for giving?*

We are told simply that she was a “poor widow.” In the original Biblical language, a “widow” was a person without any children or spouse (for “widow” meant someone who lacked everything) Being described as “poor” literally meant being hunched over like a weak beggar. We can fill in the details then of a woman without the support of a family who comes into the temple as “poor,” hunched and weak in need. How else would those who see her know she was a poor widow? Her physical appearance, coupled with the gift she gives, reveals that she is very poor. She gave from her poverty. Why would someone do this? What is motivating her, and what is not?

What isn't motivating her? Clearly, self-protection and self-interest were not her motives. With so little, that she gives away what she has and what she can't seem to afford reveals she is not thinking about herself.

Instead, I think what must motivate her was that her gift brought her **joy**. I've seen many parents and grandparents gladly go without for the sake of children and grandchildren, for the sheer joy that, though they go without, the younger ones have more. Yet, these gifts are always accompanied with joy. I can't help but think that this widow gave out of her poverty, but she also gave with joy. Joy makes sacrifices not only possible, but desirable. What the widow teaches us about giving is that it cannot be done for self-interest and, if done freely and from our need, results in joy. That she chooses to make her gift to God further completes her joy. Motivated by the deepest love there is, love of God, her act produces the deepest joy rooted in the deepest love.

Henry Ford suggested that he was “taken in,” fooled and hoodwinked into giving his things away. Might he also have been hoodwinked by his possessions, that actually were possessing him? In order to give, we choose not to be taken in—tricked or hoodwinked by the mirage that possessing produces joy. For if we are not careful, our possessions can possess us. Instead, the poor widow teaches us that we Christians are taken with the possibility of giving with sacrifice that leads to joy: joy in the very fact that we can give back to God, by remembering that, in the end, all naturally is returned to the creator. Make no mistake: how and why we give is a deeply spiritual matter.

The poor widow challenges us to consider: do our possessions really give us joy and peace, or, if we are honest, do they lead us to fear and anxiety? Do we possess them, or do they possess us? This widow teaches us: as much as we can, even out of need, let us give—our possessions, and at the same time surrender our anxiety and fear about them—and in giving let us receive the peace and joy that comes from generosity. Are our possessions possessing us? Do others need our generosity in order to live more fully? Let us, the followers of Jesus, give and live. And in doing so, let's be taken in by joy.