

32B SML 2018
MK 12:38-44

The temple complex in Jerusalem at the time of Our Blessed Lord included the “court of women.” There, behind the colonnades, lay a hall in which visitors to the temple could leave offerings of money for the maintenance of the sanctuary and its daily sacrifices. This hall was called the “treasury.” There you gave your money to the priest who served in the treasury, you named the amount and the purpose of your gift. That way, everyone nearby could hear how much you gave and why. This is the background to the logic of today’s gospel.

Let’s fill in the details. Jesus was very close to the treasury and He heard the “how much” and “why” of every gift. There was a constant coming and going - Jews from:

- ✓ the homeland and the Diaspora,
- ✓ young and old,
- ✓ men and women,
- ✓ rich and poor.

Their classes and origins could be read in their dress and in their speech.

A woman entered the treasury. Her clothes showed she was poor, and her apparel also showed she was a widow,

living in a double kind of misery. She was not only poor; she was no longer protected by her husband. Jesus saw how she gave her gift to the priest, and he heard that she was offering two copper coins. The copper coin was the smallest unit of money there was, just as a penny is to us. Jesus was touched by the event. Here was a harsh contrast: just now the rich, and here the poor! Just now silver, often amounting to large sums, and here, two copper coins!

Jesus also saw the background: the rich who were neither pained or deprived by offering a silver shekel, and the poor widow who gave everything she had. The two copper coins would have secured her food for the next day. They were literally a necessity of life. But of this utmost necessity she gave not only half – she could, after all, have handed the priest one coin, but no, she offered everything. She was “all in.”

Jesus saw the full implications of the event. He called His disciples together, pointed to the woman who was already going away, and told them what he had just seen. He not only told the story but interprets it, and thus the little narrative reaches the point it was heading toward from the beginning. Jesus said: the widow there has given more than all the others, for the others have given only a small part of their property, but

this woman has given everything, her whole living. She was “all in.”

The reader of Mark’s gospel is meant to see the widow’s sacrifice against the background of the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus. The reign of God – that means that God turns to human beings totally and without any reservation in order to bring divine abundance to the world. This self-gift of God was an event happening in the new community Jesus was creating.

Therefore the reign of God attracts those disciples who are able to experience God’s overflowing self-gift, so that they in turn give everything they have: their whole heart, their whole existence. The poor widow who gave her two copper coins becomes the example, the role model for disciples. Disciples need to be “all in.”

I’d also like to call attention to where Mark places this story in his gospel, which is right before his discourse of the last things and the beginning of the passion narrative. The widow’s gift reflects for Mark the “wholeness” of Jesus’ gift of His life. The widow’s gift reflects what Jesus had quoted in last Sunday’s gospel. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with

all your strength.” (MK 12:30) In her gift, the widow gave everything she had: her heart, her soul, her mind, her strength. She was “all in.”

Of course the objections surface.

- ✓ What will the woman have to eat the next day if she has given everything away?
- ✓ What kind of God would require this totality?
- ✓ A God who devours people totally?
- ✓ A God who robs the poor of their last dollar?

Precisely at this point it is evident that the story of the widow’s offering, like all stories in sacred scripture, forces us to concretize, to locate the “place” of the reign of God. The reign of God is not a nebulous thing that lies in the future or is deeply hidden in the human soul. Rather, it demands a “place” and that “place” is the Church.

Like the story of Bartimaeus two weeks ago, Jesus calls Bartimaeus, gathering him into the community of the church, thereby giving him sight and enabling to walk the right path. The Church is that community whereby we learn, through Christ, how to see and how to walk. The story of Bartimaeus, rooted in a real encounter, is a beautiful icon of the Church.

The reign of God is concretized in the Church. The reign of God is located in the Church and the Church develops her effectiveness where people live the new common life established by God and endow that common life with everything they have so those like Bartimaeus, like the poor widow are not alone. There will be the Church, filled with people who are “all in,”

- ✓ to offer the widow protection,
- ✓ who will share their meals with her,
- ✓ help her to pay her bills,
- ✓ who will mourn her husband’s loss with her.

In the Church, those like the widow will not be devoured by their misfortune, but will find comfort and a sense of inner peace with disciples who are “all in.” That’s why it is no accident Mark tells this story just before Jesus’ passion. As Jesus’ “all in” runs through all His words, it also saturates all He did, His words and His deeds culminating in His “giving everything”, His being “all in,” His heart, His soul, His mind, His strength, His life, on the Cross.