

Jesus is sitting opposite the treasury, that part of the Temple grounds known as the Women's Court. This courtyard held 13 trumpet shaped receptacles that were there to receive alms for the temple upkeep. Before the days of paper money, the larger coins made the containers ring out. Significantly, this loud ringing of coins could be heard throughout the entire courtyard, announcing the generosity of the donor. You can probably imagine who threw coins the hardest. People who liked to draw attention to themselves! The kind of people who wore long robes, liked to accept greetings in the marketplace, and seats of honor in the synagogue and banquet tables. And who wouldn't like a little attention after making the trumpets ring out? What good is generosity if no one knows about it? But a curious thing happens. Jesus isn't sitting around, listening for the loud clanging sounds of large coins. Indeed, a different sound captures his attention. The soft, almost imperceptible pinging of two tiny coins gently dropped into the bell of a trumpet by a poor widow. As donations go, it wasn't much. She donated two small coins known as *lepta*, the least valuable coins in circulation at the time. The *lepta* was worth about one-sixty-fourth of a *denarius*. A *denarius* was worth about a penny, the average daily wage for an unskilled laborer back then. So, the whole donation was worth about one thirty-second of a cent.

Back in Jesus time, just like today, it's not so much that there was too little to give to the poor. It's more about the rich thinking that they never have enough. And that attitude can lead to exploitation. In the Ancient Near East, widows often had someone serving as their legal agent. Often that someone was a scribe. Some, scribes, not all, were preoccupied with their status and thought themselves to be morally superior. It was scribes like these who were morally and spiritually bankrupt. So much so, that they could fall into exploiting the very widows they were supposed to care for. As a result, widows might even be financially abused, adding to the cloud of physical, sexual, and social abuse they were already facing.

Jesus' condemnation of unscrupulous scribes is part of his public teaching. But then, privately, he calls the disciples together to highlight the significance of the widow's sacrifice. It's really a continuation of earlier lessons in Mark's gospel. For example, Jesus taught the apostles to care for children, the most defenseless of God's little ones. Then there was Bartimaeus, who tossed everything away to follow Jesus. Now Jesus praises the widow who gives her whole livelihood, everything she has to live on. Only one chapter later, Mark's passion narrative begins. And during the passion, Jesus let's go of everything. He gives his life to the grave, the same place where he rises from the dead.

Bible scholars caution that today's gospel should not be used to romanticize poverty, nor to condemn large donations. It's not about the relative amount of alms that someone. The important thing is the motivation for giving. Having said that, Jesus clearly suggests that small gifts from our substance are worth more than large gifts given from our surplus. That's because giving out of substance is often motivated by gratitude and love. That's not to say can't be. But beware the gift that's given purely for show. At its best, giving is always about the recipient, not the giver. Clearly, Jesus used strong words against the scribes whose religion was more visible on their sleeves, than it was in their hearts. When giving is motivated solely to make the giver look good, Jesus calls out such behavior for what it is – contemptible! In contrast, the widow's seemed to really touch his heart. Maybe that's because in her simple action, Jesus recognized his own future. The widow opened her hand and gave her all to the Lord of Israel. And Jesus would soon be on a hill outside Jerusalem. And on that hill, Jesus opens his arms and surrenders his all to the father. Accordingly, both the widow and Jesus offer their gifts to God – gifts of inestimable value, graciously given.

Soon, we will participate in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, remembering all God has done for us. Then the Body and Blood of Christ will be placed into our open hands. As we receive the gift of Eucharist, it's appropriate to remember the widows, widowers, orphans, and the rest of God's little ones that are with us right here and scattered throughout the world. They are the victims of war, mass shootings, crime, opioids, discrimination of all kinds, abuse and even natural disasters. At times we shake our heads in disgust and can't understand how or why all these things are happening. But at other times we turn off our television sets in despair, and just get on with our lives as if there are no solutions. Jesus came to teach us a different way. Victims of all kinds need our thoughts and prayers to be sure. But are thoughts and prayers truly enough? Just this past week the mother of a mass shooting victim said no. She did not want any more prayers! She didn't want any more thoughts. She called for action. So, with the help of the Eucharist, do something for God's little ones. Open your hearts! Open your arms! Open your hands! Reach out! Because when you help someone in need, God works through you turning despair into hope. And hope is more than money can ever buy. Much more!

## **Intercessions:**

**32nd Sunday of the Year (B)**

**November 11, 2018**

Presider: Let us pray for needs of this gathered community and for our world..

Our response: God of love, hear our prayer. For the church and for all the faithful people of God, for the ability to be counted among the just and the faithful who care for the oppressed and poor: We pray ...

2. For world leaders and all who create public policy, for work promoting justice and the common good, for a way of life that ensures dignity for all human life: We pray ...,
3. For courage to imitate the faith of the widow, to offer what we have trusting God to fill our need: We pray ...
4. For the humility to see the poverty in each of our lives as an invitation to rely on God's strength: We pray ...
5. For all the sick of our parish community; for those who live with addiction or face depression each day, for all who yearn for healing: We pray ...
6. For service men and women and for all who have given their lives in service to our country; for willingness among us to examine our own violent ways and to practice kindness, speak with compassion and contribute to making peace each day: We pray ...
7. For all our faithful departed: We pray ...

The parish community would like to support you in prayer.

Please share with us your needs and intentions.

Presider: God of justice, hear our prayers and help us each live out our faith and trust in you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen