

Homily for 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, b cycle, November 7, 2021

In one of the ancient commentaries based on the Book of Leviticus, there is a story of a priest of the temple of Jerusalem who was approached by a poor woman. She offered him a handful of flour as a contribution. Her modest contribution angered the priest, and he began to scold her for her lack of generosity. But that very night the priest received in a vision a sharp rebuke from God, who said to him, "Despise her not. It is as though she offered her life".

In biblical times, the Temple functioned as a bank with savings and donations kept in the treasury. In one of the courts, the court of women, there were thirteen collection boxes, trumpet shaped receptacles into which Jews deposited their donations.

The widow's contribution was modest, indeed. It was a few cents, an insignificant amount.

We are not told her name. In addition, in a large crowd of pilgrims she would likely be unnoticed. But Jesus noticed her. He singled her out for praise. Bear in mind that widows in the cultural world of Jesus were often exploited. They enjoyed few legal rights and were a class of powerless, vulnerable citizens. In today's gospel reading the scribes are criticized for devouring the "houses of widows" (Mk. 12:40).

It is generally true that very rich people can easily afford to be generous givers since they have a surplus of wealth. A generous donation does not necessarily suggest sacrificial giving. Of the poor widow Christ said, "This poor woman put in more than all the contributors to the treasury. For they all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood (Mk. 12:43-44).

Several years ago, a prominent owner of a professional baseball team offered to make a sizable contribution to his alma mater, Williams College in Massachusetts. But there was one stipulation: The building erected with his money must bear his name. He wanted his generosity known and rewarded.

His offer was rejected.

Only recently, I received a generous gift of one thousand dollars for our school. The donor, a former parishioner whose children were enrolled At Sacred Heart School years ago, insisted that he remain anonymous. I can always count on him for his annual donation. I have always respected his wishes.

He is a man of humility and generosity. He did not want to draw attention to himself.

The poor widow in today's gospel is a model of faith. Her treasure is not in earthly possessions but in God. Her meager contribution meant she would have to rely on God for her next meal.

The late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, recently declared a saint of the Church, was fond of saying that God does not expect great deeds of us. God only wants small deeds done with great love.

Many biblical scholars see the widow as a figure of the one who came to give his life and her example announces the gift that Jesus will make of his own life.

Today's gospel reading demands a self-examination of each of us.

Am I generous?

Do I make donations begrudgingly?

Do I recognize the value of sacrificial giving?

We can learn so much from the example of the poor widow, the key figure in today's gospel.