

Piety of Generosity

What inspired the widow to put all her money into the Temple treasury? (Mk 12:41-44) What kind of spirituality did she have? Jesus pointed to her as someone that his disciples should imitate. What does he want us to learn from her?

First of all, her contribution shows us how much she trusted in God. She only had two coins, so she could have chosen to give only one coin. By giving everything, she expressed complete trust. She loved God with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength. God was her rock.

Jesus said, ***“from her poverty, she has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood”*** (Mk 12:44). Her giving expressed total trust in God’s providence. It was a reckless gesture of faith that reminds us of another time when Jesus said, ***“Do not worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear... Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?”*** (Mt 6:25-26).

We worry because we don’t trust in God’s providence. But the poor often teach us how to trust in the Lord. That is why Jesus said, ***“Blessed are you who are poor; yours is the kingdom of God”*** (Lk 6:20). The poor live inside of God’s providence. To be a disciple is to trust that God will provide all that we need.

When I was on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, one day we were taking up the collection for World Mission Sunday. One poor elderly lady was providing a home for ten or more children and grandchildren. She had barely enough to get by each month. I saw her put \$50 into the collection, and I was tempted to tell her not to give so much.

She gave with reckless faith. Her giving reflected deep trust in God. She was like the widow of Zarephath who trusted that God would provide when Elijah told her, ***“The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth”*** (1 K 17:14).

The widows are examples of true piety. The First Letter to Timothy states, ***“There is great gain in piety that is sufficient unto itself”*** (1 Tm 6:6). It means a piety that is totally satisfied with God’s love. The only thing necessary for them is to abide in God’s presence.

Even in suffering, the person is peaceful because their piety is sufficient unto itself. It is not that they don’t have problems. Elijah and the widow were experiencing a drought and a famine. She didn’t know where her next meal would come from.

He was fleeing from a corrupt king who wanted to kill him. Yet, he told her, ***“The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth.”*** They trusted that God would provide in famine and persecution. They had a piety that is sufficient unto itself – totally satisfied with God’s love.

The first lesson for disciples is to trust completely in divine providence. To be a disciple is to trust that God will provide whatever we need. To have a piety that is sufficient unto itself. Not to be free of problems or suffering, but to have endurance and hope in the worst of times. In the end, the disciple trusts like Jesus did as he went to the cross.

The second lesson for disciples is to live with divine generosity. Once we experience how God generously provides in every situation, the next step is to become a steward of God’s generosity.

Disciples not only trust that God will provide, but also, they use their gifts as an expression of God's generosity.

The widow of Zarephath provided Elijah with hospitality. She shared with him what little food she had and even a room to stay in. God provided for Elijah through the generosity of the widow. In her poverty she was a steward of God's generosity. She had a piety of generosity.

To be a disciple is to realize that everything we have is a gift from God. Then it means to use our gifts for God's glory. It means to see ourselves as stewards of God's generosity. The Lord shares his blessings with us so that we can extend his blessing to others. Stewardship is always a response to God's generosity.

We practice stewardship in various ways through our time, talent, and treasure. Prioritizing time for prayer, both Sunday Mass and daily personal prayer, keeps us in touch with God's providence. Then we are stewards of our talents by serving others at home, in the parish, and society at-large. Our service is a response to Jesus' love poured out on the cross. We are stewards of God's business of loving the world.

Finally, how we spend money should reflect God's generosity to others. We should use our treasure as stewards of God's generosity. Obviously, the primary use of money for parents is to provide for the family. Also, disciples dedicate a portion of their treasure to the work of the Church. One model is to tithe, or to give the first 10 percent of your income to the Church. Why the first 10 percent? It is a way of recognizing that everything comes from God.

One model of tithing is to give 5 percent to the parish, 2 percent to the annual diocesan appeal, and 3 percent to other charities. Let's say that you are currently giving 2 percent of your annual income, not yet 10 percent. Then consider increasing that to 3 percent to the Church and charities. Make a resolution to deepen your commitment to the mission of Christ by supporting the ministries of the Church. Priests and religious sisters participate in the mission by dedicating their lives to the Lord. But everyone shares in the mission of Christ. By our Baptism we are co-responsible for his mission.

Everyone wants more seminarians, but we cannot afford it. One goal for Vision 2030 is to ordain two priests each year, which would require about five men entering seminary each year. But if only two or three men were to go to the seminary each year, we could not afford it based on the current giving patterns of Catholics in the Diocese. God will provide the seminarians we need, but our financial commitment to the mission needs to match it.

Disciples trust that God will provide whatever they need. They have a piety that is sufficient unto itself. They trust that God will carry them through the toughest times. As a consequence, they become stewards of God's generosity. They have a piety of generosity.

How have you experienced God's mercy? How has God provided for you in tough times? Does your generosity toward others reflect God's generosity toward you? Be a faithful steward of God's love by living a piety of generosity.