

November 7, 2021
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 12:38-44

In the course of his teaching Jesus said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation."

He 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."

Background:

It will be helpful to remember the gospel text from three weeks back, when James and John came to Jesus to ask that they be granted the seats on Jesus' right and left when he comes into his glory. (Mark 10:35-45) Jesus' instruction to his disciples was "... whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first will be slave of all." (Mark 10:43) Mark's description of the scribes here is the total opposite of Jesus' instruction and his own way of living among them. The scribes do not identify with the poor servant class, or even with the common people of the day. They seek positions among the elite. Jesus makes no attempt to hide his criticism, and it is likely that the scribes themselves would have overheard his remarks.

Widows were among the lowest members of society. The word itself in Hebrew carries a meaning of one who is silent, unable to speak. That is because all women were expected to remain within the interior of the house while men occupied the public arena. The concerns of a woman were expressed by her father or husband. If a woman became a widow and had no married sons who could take her into his home, she would return to the house of her father or a brother. If none of these were possible, she was usually forced to beg. Widows had no status of their own. In this society, the care of widows became one of the basic values.

The second part of the gospel text for today is linked to the first by the word 'widow.' By putting the two texts next to each other, Mark emphasizes the self-indulgent behavior of the scribes. To support the temple treasury, thirteen trumpet-shaped chests were placed in the courtyard. When coins were placed into these, the sounds of the coins could be heard by others. Donations of large coins made significant noise as they fell to the bottom. The coin that the widow used was the smallest in use at the time; its value was about 1/64 of the daily wage of a laborer. By including the detail that she placed two coins into the treasury, Mark makes sure his audience is aware that her intention is to hold nothing back, not even one of her small coins.

Jesus' comments have a tone of lament, rather than praise for the widow's generosity. The widow, like other people of the day, has been taught by the scribes the value of sacrificial giving. The temple offerings are designated to be used for the care of the needy. But there is a hidden implication that the scribes have been using some of the funds to enhance their own appearance.

Truly the widow has given all that she had to live on, demonstrating her total trust in God to take care of her. Her gift will not enhance her status or reputation, like the large gifts of the others. The widow's gift is a gift of herself, her very life in service to God. Her gift will not affect anyone else but herself. While the widow may have great trust in God, the larger situation of the religious leadership of the day is troubling Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some of the reasons people choose to give to charities, churches, and institutions? What are some of the reasons you choose to make donations?
2. Are there reasons that you do NOT make donations?

3. Who are the people without a voice in your community?
4. Are there also people in your community who make a special effort to hear the voice of those who are usually not heard?
5. Can you imagine Jesus in this gospel standing up in the public area, maybe right outside the temple in Jerusalem, with people on their way to and from the temple, with a group gathered to hear him teach, and maybe some others listening but more at a distance. Maybe you can even hear the sound of the coins being dropped in the metal horn-shaped treasuries in the distance. Can you imagine other sounds too? And smells of animals and other people and food? What is the mood of the people going to the temple, those coming from the temple, those listening to Jesus, and those more at a distance? What is the mood of Jesus himself, and of you yourself? Does the widow hear Jesus' teaching today? If so, what happens to her as she hears Jesus talk about her and her offering? What happens within the crowd of listeners? Among those at a distance? Within you?
6. Can you take some time to talk with God about your awareness of yourself as you reflected on this gospel text? What would you like to say to God? How does God want to respond to you?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for November 7, 2021, the Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." She left to get it, and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread." She answered, "As the Lord lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid. Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son. For the Lord, the God of Israel, says, '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.'" She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well; the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the Lord had foretold through Elijah.

Praise the Lord, my soul! The Lord keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets captives free and gives sight to the blind. The Lord raises up those who were bowed down; the Lord loves the just and protects strangers.

The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one,
but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf.
Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters
each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own;
if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world.
But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice.
Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment, so also Christ,
offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time,
not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around
in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues,
and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext
recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation."
He 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 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."

Excerpts from 1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146:7-10; Hebrews 9:24-28; and Mark 12:38-44

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for November 7th, as prepared by Franciscan
spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Mark, Jesus tells the people to beware of the scribes in their
desire for honor for themselves. He then points out to his disciples how a widow's contribution of two small coins is
"more than all the other contributors to the treasury. They have contributed from their surplus, but she has contributed
all she had."

The other readings also make reference to the greatness of small contributions from those such as widows who have
little to give, and God's sustaining power for them, and that Jesus' sacrifice of all he had brings salvation to his people
forever.

In the first reading from 1 Kings, Elijah asked a widow for some bread, but she had only enough for a last meal for herself
and her son. Yet at Elijah's urging, she made some for him first. Then "the jar of oil did not go empty, nor the jug of oil
run dry," while the three of them were all able to eat for a year. Psalm 146 declares, "The Lord keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed, and gives food to the hungry. The fatherless and the widow he sustains. He shall reign
forever." In the second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, Paul writes that Christ's sacrifice of his whole livelihood
"once and for all brings salvation to those who await him."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!