

November 10, 2024
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 12:38-44

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 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 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). Jesus' own disciples also seem to be looking for places of distinction and honor much like the scribes Jesus is warning about in today's Gospel.

Jesus' attitude toward the scribes here is in contrast to the relations Jesus had with the scribe who had come asking about which was the greatest commandment in last week's Gospel. Jesus said of him that he had answered with understanding and that he was not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:34). Jesus' attitude towards the scribes in this Gospel is the polar opposite from the mutually respectful attitude portrayed in last week's Gospel. Here the scribes do not identify with the poor, but seem to exploit their position to enhance their position of respect in the community.

Widows were among the lowest members of society. The word itself in Hebrew carries a meaning of one who is silent, unable to speak. Women were expected to remain within the interior of the house while men occupied the public arena. A woman who became a widow normally moved to the home of her father, brother, or married son. If that was not possible, she was usually forced to beg.

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 emphasized 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 significantly more noise as they fell to the bottom. The coin that the widow used was the smallest, its value was about 1/64 of the daily wage of a laborer, and attracted little attention as it fell to the bottom. But by including the detail, the emphasis is not on the noise her offering made but on the quality of her offering. 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 the 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 presumption that these 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?
2. What are some of the reasons you choose to make donations and where you choose to make your donations?
3. Are their reasons that you do not make donations?
4. Who are the people without a voice in your community?
5. Are there also people in your community who make a special effort to hear the voices of those who are usually not heard?
6. What are some of the feelings and attitudes this widow might have faced as she came to make her offering?
7. What are some of the things Jesus seem to have noticed about this widow?
8. 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 fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscc-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.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for November 10, 2024, 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

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for November 10th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Mark, while teaching in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus warns the crowd to be wary of the scribes. "They go around in long robes and accept greetings and places of honor in synagogues and at banquets. They devour the houses of widows, and as a pretext recite lengthy prayers. They will receive severe condemnation." Then, upon seeing a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury, Jesus tells his disciples, "She put in more than all the others. They contributed from their surplus wealth; but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had."

The other readings have additional references to the plight of widows, and to giving all someone has in spite of their plight, and the ultimate rewards of giving in this manner, made possible by the saving gift Jesus gave. In the first reading from 1 Kings, when Elijah asks a widow at the entrance of the city for a bit of water and bread, she replies, "I have only a handful of flour and a little oil. Just now I was going to prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." Elijah said, "Do not be afraid. First make a little cake and bring it to me. Then prepare something for yourself and your son. The Lord says, 'the jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry.'" And the three were able to eat for a year. Psalm 146 exclaims, "The Lord gives food to the hungry, he loves the just. The widow he sustains, he keeps faith forever." In the second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, we hear, "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."

We are a few weeks from the close of our liturgical year. In the one chapter of Mark's gospel that remains between today's gospel and the chapters that cover Jesus' last supper and crucifixion, Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple, and he tells some disciples about signs of the end, and persecution and tribulation to occur before the Son of Man comes in power and glory. Our gospel for the week after this will come from that chapter. The one following that will be from John's gospel, on the feast of Christ the King. These will close out the liturgical year; the Sunday following that is the first Sunday of Advent.

Joe

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