

Thirty-second Sunday – November 8, 2015

Recently, several commentators have suggested that today's gospel has for too long been oversimplified by the church. They say that Jesus is not praising the widow and her small offering. Instead, they say, Jesus is lamenting that she has been duped by a corrupt religious establishment into giving away all she had to live on. She is, therefore, just another example of a widow whose house has been devoured. Her generosity plays into the devouring greed of the Temple. Those who are supposed to protect her leave her, literally, penniless. What is most frightening is that she unconsciously cooperated with her exploitation. The widow may not grasp all that is going on, but Jesus, who is sensitive to all duplicity, has not missed it. And here's how the picture is filled out.

Jesus is sitting in the temple opposite the treasury. He is observing all those who are making contributions for the upkeep of the Temple. Thirteen trumpet-shaped metal receptacles were available for people to deposit their money. Large contributions made a lot of noise, probably attracting a lot of attention and a smattering of applause. As Jesus watches, a poor, unnoticed widow puts in two small coins, worth very little. She neither made much noise nor attracted any notice – except from Jesus.

Why would Jesus notice her? Why would Jesus call his disciples over to speak to them about her? Perhaps Jesus noticed her and spoke about her because she reminded him of someone. She withheld nothing from God; neither did he.

It took one to know one. When Jesus looked at her, it was as if he were looking at a mirror reflection of himself. "She's the one," Jesus might have told his disciples. "She's exactly what I've been talking about. Look at her. The one without a penny to her name; she's the one to watch."

Like her, Jesus will soon be asked to make his "whole livelihood"; he will be asked to make a total gift of his life to God for others; he will hold nothing back.

Jesus, of course, is not asking us to bankrupt ourselves and put all our savings into the next collection basket. In fact we should be wary of those who make extravagant promises for our open wallets. But he is holding up the example of this widow to remind us that our faith and trust in God must not be shallow; our commitment to God must not be measured out in teaspoons. No! All life is a gift from God, and all life is offered back to God, the Giver of every good gift. Our giving, ore deep and more and more abiding, will not change the world overnight. But it will change us. That's a start.