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Meditations: Sunday of the Thirty-Second Week of Ordinary Time (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-second week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the poor widow and her offering in the Temple; she gives "all she had to live on;" giving ourselves generously to God and others.

11/10/2024

- The poor widow and her offering in the Temple
- She gives "all she had to live on"
- Giving ourselves generously to God and others

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IN TODAY'S Gospel, we see Jesus at the treasury of the Temple in Jerusalem. In that area, valuable objects and monetary donations were kept, and it was called the "treasury" from a Greek word meaning "custody of the treasure." There were thirteen collection boxes with trumpet-shaped openings, placed in the spacious area where pilgrims passed through when entering.

Jesus is there, observing people as they give their money. *Many rich people put in large sums (Mk 12:41),* Saint Mark notes. But what catches the Lord's attention are not the large donations, but the two small coins a poor widow offers. To human eyes, her donation might seem insignificant, but not to the Lord. Jesus immediately calls his disciples and teaches them: *Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. For they all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on (Mk 12:43-44).*

Sacred Scripture often shows us God's special love for the poor and vulnerable (widows, orphans, foreigners...), and here we see it again. The Gospel also reminds us that if we want to please God, it is more important to be humble and generous than to perform great feats. "Because of her extreme poverty, [the

widow] could have offered a single coin to the temple and kept the other for herself. But she did not want to give just half to God; she divested herself of everything. In her poverty she understood that in having God, she had everything; she felt completely loved by him and in turn loved him completely,”^[1] — discreetly offering Him all of the little she had.

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THE WIDOW in the Temple gave *all she had to live on* (Mk 12:44). We don't know her story: how she was widowed, how long it had been since she had lost her husband, or what she did to try to survive... Perhaps she had come to the Temple on a pilgrimage, and consumed nearly all her limited resources along the way. Once there, however, she did not hold back her offering; she gave what she had, placing herself in

God's hands. This is what Jesus, who could see into her heart, values. Beyond merely giving *something*, she gave herself, trusting in what the Lord would do with her life.

In contrast, the evangelist tells us that *many rich people put in large sums* (Mk 12:41). These words suggest a certain vanity or ostentation in the way they gave their alms. But this passage does not speak directly to that. The most important difference from the widow lies on a deeper level, within the soul, in what the Bible calls the heart; the hidden center of the person, the place of decision and truth, which only the Spirit of God can truly search.^[2]

In her heart, the poor widow lives a total surrender to God. Her offering is a spiritual act of worship; by donating her two small coins, she offers herself *as a living sacrifice*,

holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). In contrast, the rich who do not live with that attitude only give the Lord part of what they are or what they have. In this case, that is money, but it could also be time spent in good activities, meticulous adherence to precepts, or even prayers and sacrifices... What Jesus wants, though, is what this woman gave: *all she had to live on (Mk 12:44).* Jesus knows that our true happiness doesn't lie in holding back a few coins, but in giving everything to God, and in doing so, receiving everything from Him.

IN SCRIPTURE, we read about another widow, almost nine centuries earlier, in Zarephath, a city in Lebanon between Tyre and Sidon. The prophet Elijah arrives there during a time of drought and famine.

He had come from the desert, but God assured him that a widow would provide food for him. Elijah obeys, and when he arrives, he finds a predictable situation: in those hard times, the widow, supporting a fatherless son, is the first to run out of almost everything. She only has a little flour and oil left. Although she knows that the food can only slightly delay their death, she plans to use it to make a small final meal for herself and her son. Elijah asks her for something audacious: to share her meager supplies with him. He promises her, in the Lord's name, that *the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry* (1 Kgs 17:14). She recognizes that he is a man of God and trusts in his word.

This Old Testament story teaches us about faith and generous solidarity. It helps us understand how to share our lives with others, fruitfully and without calculating the cost.

“Perhaps yesterday you were one of those people whose ideals have gone sour, who are defrauded in their human ambitions. Today, now that God has entered into your life — thank you, my God! — you laugh and sing and carry your smile, your Love and your happiness wherever you go.”^[3] —

We can ask Mary to help us trust more and more in God in the different circumstances of our lives, especially when we feel his call to take a further step in our dedication to Him, which will often mean giving ourselves more generously to others. “We must live with total self-giving,” said Saint Josemaría, “loving the Lord with all our strength and knowing that sacrifices and difficulties will not be lacking in our task. But I assure you that if we live like this, we will be very happy: happy to live for God and in God.”^[4] —

[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 8-XI-2015.

[2] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2563.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 81.

[4] Saint Josemaría, qtd. Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Rialp, Madrid, 2000, pg. 83 (our translation).

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