Commentary on the Gospel: Give What You Can

Gospel for the 32nd week in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 12:38-44)

And in his teaching Jesus said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living."

Commentary

The "treasury" at the entrance to the Temple of Jerusalem was a receptacle to receive the alms of the wealthy and those of humble means, to help support the expenses of

worship. Intermingled that day with those depositing large sums was a poor woman who the all-seeing and loving eyes of our Lord did not fail to notice.

The situation of widows in ancient times could reach dramatic levels, above all if the dead husband had not left any money or possessions. Women depended upon the work of men in large measure for their own support. So losing the head of the family left many of them in extreme poverty. And thus Scripture often exhorts the people to look after and provide for them.

Jesus, who "knew what was in man" (*Jn* 2:25), experienced a special joy when he saw how that poor widow offered all she had to live on for the Temple expenses. For she viewed the worship offered to God as more important than her own security and support.

Together with prayer and fasting, alms-giving is one of the most pleasing actions in God's eyes, when it is done with a right intention and a generous and detached spirit, when it is really costs us and we give without seeking any personal advantage. "Didn't you see the light in Jesus' eyes as the poor widow left her little alms in the temple? Give him what you can: the merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it."[1]

Jesus points to the example of the poor widow to encourage us to be magnanimous with God and those around us. As Saint Josemaria said, "magnanimity means greatness of spirit, a largeness of heart wherein many can find refuge. Magnanimity gives us the energy to break out of ourselves and be prepared to undertake generous tasks which will be of benefit to all. Small-mindedness has no home in the

magnanimous heart, nor has meanness, nor egoistic calculation, nor self-interested trickery. The magnanimous person devotes all his strength, unstintingly, to what is worthwhile. As a result he is capable of giving himself. He is not content with merely giving. He gives his very self. He thus comes to understand that the greatest expression of magnanimity consists in giving oneself to God."[2]

God always deserves the best of our love and affection, of our time and dedication. When a person or a family give what they can to God with generosity and joy, as the just man Abel did, they receive from the Lord a hundredfold and many blessings.

"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury" (v. 43). The conviction that our Lord

sees and appreciates every small act of affection and self-giving, even though quite small and hidden, will spur us to be more generous with him and those around us.

[1] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 829.

[2] *Friends of God*, no. 80.

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