

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 5:3

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.
 Blessed are the poor in spirit,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 12:38-44; L155B

**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.”**

or Mark 12:41-44 in Appendix A, p. 306.

Reflecting on the Gospel

Who are the four people you would like to have dinner with in heaven? Many of us might choose famous personalities from history. Others might choose long-lost relatives. Whomever we choose, these are people we really want to be with. We'd want to spend time with them and learn from their experiences. On the flip side, there are those who love going to dinner parties, being seen at dinner parties. They love to rub shoulders with the powerful, the movers, and

the shakers. They like their tickets to the cultural events, the opera, the symphony, baseball and football games. This type of person who loves to be seen is a well-known character in literature. It seems even in Jesus' time these people were readily spotted. For Jesus, they become a target. Jesus is especially critical of this character type who also happens to be a religious leader (!) who “devour[s] the houses of widows.” They pray for show, and enjoy the privileges that come with their office. Their condemnation will be severe. In many respects Jesus' critique of the religious authorities is echoed by Pope Francis's critique of religious authorities. Even though we may not be religious authorities, the critique certainly applies



to us as well. Is our going to church for show? Is it more cultural and societal than religious and spiritual?

In the second vignette in today's gospel Jesus criticizes the rich, who give large sums to make a show, and to attract attention to their giving. Even though their gifts were large, and undoubtedly made a difference, these people gave from their excess. It was pocket change, not the milk money. The poor widow, she whose house is being devoured by the religious authorities, gives everything she has. In other words, they who had much gave little of what they had. She who had little gave everything she had. What kind of givers are we? Do we give of ourselves or from our excess? Jesus' message is to give everything we have, without holding anything back. It's too easy to game the system, to make a show out of giving, to have our names on plaques or printed in newsletters. Today many charitable organizations and parishes even have giving clubs with various levels. And, of course, there is an entire industry today that has been developed around giving and fundraising.

But Jesus is speaking of something more profound. Rather than the annual fundraising appeal that each of us participate in, or charitable contributions that are a hallmark of Christianity, we are summoned by Jesus to give our entire selves. Rather than write a check equivalent to a family dinner at a restaurant, Jesus wants us entirely, without reservation.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Our lives can be saturated with requests for giving, to the parish, Boy Scout popcorn, Girl Scout cookies, band, sports teams, charitable causes, and more. These are all good deeds that are done from our sense of Christian charity. But there can be a temptation for some, especially religious leaders, to become enamored by the funds themselves and the kind of life they can provide. At that point hypocrisy can ensue, encouraging others to give without making a similar commitment ourselves. Christians in the early centuries of the church

recognized this all too often and had a name for those who would use the name of Jesus to make a comfortable life for themselves: Christ-monger. We are probably familiar with the modern televangelist style Christ-monger. But rather than point the finger outward, it's a good opportunity to examine ourselves and ask why we give, whether we give for pure charitable motives, or whether there might be some other hidden motives.

In the end, Jesus doesn't want our money. He wants us. He wants a total personal commitment from each of us to be his follower. When that happens, we will not count the cost, which would be greater than any price we could pay, for we are his.

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 12:38-44 (shorter form: Mark 12:41-44)

Preaching in the Jerusalem temple days before the Last Supper and his crucifixion, Jesus indicts the scribes for their lavish but empty show of faith. His indictment of them can just as easily apply today. Those who make a show of religious practice rather than live the essence of the message are worthy of indictment. They would enjoy the privilege that comes with religious authority and even use it to devour the estates of the widows, in other words, the powerless. Their faith is empty and, in the end, their judgment will be severe.

Throughout Scripture, widows were the epitome of destitution and powerlessness (today's first reading from 1 Kings is an example). Jesus again makes a considerable impact on his hearers, then, by lifting up an impoverished widow as the model of faithful generosity—as well as embodying the “Great Commandment” that Jesus spoke of in last Sunday's gospel. Only that which is given not from our abundance but from our own need and poverty—and given totally, completely, humbly, and joyfully—is a gift fitting for God.

Focusing the First Reading

1 Kgs 17:10-16

Today's first reading recalls Elijah's encounter with a poor widow. Despite her desperate poverty, she agrees to share the little that she has with the prophet. Elijah tells her not to be afraid, promising that her jar of flour will not go empty and her oil jug will not run dry.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 (1b)

This psalm (one of the “Hallelujah” psalms that conclude the Psalter) is the hymn of someone who has experienced the goodness of God in his or her own struggles and now invites the poor, the physically challenged, the oppressed, and the imprisoned to embrace the wisdom he or she has discovered in keeping faith in the Lord of justice and mercy.

Focusing the Second Reading

Heb 9:24-28

The writer of Hebrews continues his teaching to Jewish converts about the eternal priesthood of Christ as the completion of the priesthood originating with Moses and Aaron. In the sacrifice of his life, Christ has won salvation for those who have died; he will return at the end of time to gather the surviving faithful to God's dwelling place.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Have you ever met the “widow” of today's gospel?

What form has the “widow's penny” taken in your own giving? When have you given from your “poverty” rather than your surplus?

Have you ever been the recipient of someone's “reckless” giving?

Have you ever worked to obtain an honor or recognition that turned out to be less than satisfying?