

The Two Small Coins

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B) - Mk 12:38-44

Ave Maria Catholic Church, November 7, 2021 - Fr. David M Vidal

Every time we hear the Gospel, we experience the words of Peter: *“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,”* (Jn 6: 68). Today, Jesus, our Lord and Teacher, offers us another lesson on eternal life. And to illustrate his lesson, Jesus uses living examples. These examples are not abstract and unfamiliar, but concrete and common; easy to understand.

First, Jesus speaks about the Scribes. A group of Jewish leaders proficient in the Law of Moses. At the time of Jesus, many of the Scribes accepted the teachings of the Pharisees and shared their legalism and externalism.

In today’s passage of the Gospel, Jesus rebukes them for three offenses:

Superficiality was their first wrongdoing. Like the Pharisees, the Scribes were concerned with external matters. They wanted to be seen in their long robes. For them, the external appearance superseded the need of internal order and purification. To look nice was good enough. To use long robes was good enough. This superficial way of thinking led them to reject those who did not look like them.

Vanity was their second offence. That is to say, the Scribes were prideful in their own appearance. They were looking for the vainglory of this world: the salutations in the marketplaces, the best seats in their religious gatherings, and the places of honor at feasts.

Greed was their third fault. They were in search of self-profit by devouring widows' houses through their demands for offerings or payments in the name of religion.

Jesus condemns them with strong words: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence,”* (Mt 23: 25).

In today’s passage of the Gospel, Jesus also indicates that the Scribes were going to receive a greater condemnation. Why? Because they knew the law of Moses. They had the knowledge of the moral law, but they chose to adopt their own rules and to forget God’s order and wisdom.

However, the passage continues, and from the superficial, vain, and greedy Scribes, now, Jesus directs our attention to the poor widow, that same widow the scribes were trying to rob. She is putting two small coins into the treasury of the Temple.

Jesus called his disciples, and with that call, He is also calling us. Jesus is telling us: “Look, pay attention to that woman, look at her actions and learn.” What do we need to learn from this poor widow?

We must learn three virtues which are directly opposed to the Scribes’ vices:

Humility is the first virtue. The humble condition of the woman is presented with two characteristics. She is poor and she is a widow. Poverty humbles us. When we are in need, we clearly experience our limits. In moments of need, we acknowledge our dependence on someone’s charitable help. Now, her condition of being a widow only intensifies her needs because she did not have with her the person who once provided for her house.

And there she is. In the eyes of the world, she was only a poor widow coming to the Temple. However, in the eyes of Jesus she is a model and example. Does not Saint Paul teach that “*God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something*”? (1 Cor. 1:27).

The humble figure of the poor widow contrasts with the proud image of the Scribes. While the crowd praises the appearance of the Scribes, Jesus praises the heart of this woman that nobody sees.

Generosity is the second virtue. The poor widow comes with two small coins. Her offering seems to be insignificant, but in truth, it is everything she has. The Venerable Fulton Sheen must have had the image of the poor widow in his mind when he wrote this sentence: “*Never measure your generosity by what you give, but rather by what you have left.*” And the poor widow had nothing left to hold on to. She gave it all.

The poor’s widow generosity resembles the generosity of God. Out of his love and generosity, God created us. The whole creation is the overflowing of God’s love on his creatures. Now, God’s generosity does not stop there. After our rejection and rebellion, God the Father, generously gives us His Son who became flesh and dwelt among us. Then, God’s generosity took flesh.

The Venerable Fulton Sheen shows Jesus’s generosity with a passage of his life. He says: “*The nature of giving is best illustrated in the life of our blessed Lord, who one day was approached by a leper who asked for healing. The gospel tells us that our Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the leper. Jesus could have healed without the touch, as he healed the servant of the centurion at a distance.*”

Why, then, in the face of one of life’s greatest miseries and a disease from which the healthy often recoil, did the Lord cure with a touch? The Son of God made man touched the leper in order to annihilate distance between the Giver and the receiver, between Lover and the

beloved, to prove sympathy by contact, to identify himself with the woes of others.” Fulton J. Sheen in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from Fulton J. Sheen* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2004), 10.

We may also recall the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta who used to say: *“A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty ourselves.”* This is the generosity of Christ who gives, and He *gives until it hurts*. He gives His life on the Cross for our eternal salvation, and He gives His last drop of blood for our purification.

The greed of the Scribes contrasts with the generosity of the poor widow praised by Jesus. Like Jesus, the poor widow gave it all.

Profound Faith is the third virtue. The action of the poor widow, materially speaking, is insignificant. However, spiritually, and theologically, her action is very meaningful. The contribution to the treasury of the Temple was necessary for divine worship, for charitable work, and for the support of its ministers. The two small coins of the poor widow have meaning and purpose. Her giving is an act of worship to God. She shows that the love of God is at the center of her heart, and that forgetting herself, she is ready to offer her sacrifice. The profound faith of the poor widow contrasts with the superficiality of the Scribes who perform actions for the praise of men.

Now, let us not reduce the two small coins of the poor widow to the monetary contribution. The two small coins have a greater meaning. They signify the giving of her heart. In a sense, what she does, is what Saint Paul teaches: *“Whatever you do, do it from the heart, not to please men, but God,”* (Col. 3:23)

Do not be afraid of giving your two small coins either at home with your family, at work with your coworkers, or at school with your companions. You must be ready to give yourself, and to do it from the heart. You are not losing two coins. You are investing them for eternal life. Perhaps nobody may notice your act of giving; perhaps nobody may praise your sacrifice, but Jesus does, and nothing matters more than that: to please God here on earth, and to enjoy His presence in heaven forever. Amen.