

Reflection for the 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

“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.” Mark 12: 43-44

The Gospel Reading we have this Sunday is often referred to as the “Widow’s mite,” and is also found in the Gospel of Luke Chapter 21:1-3. This Gospel about the Widow giving not of her surplus wealth but of her poverty, is not found in the Gospel of Matthew or John. This Gospel Reading when it appears at a Sunday Mass is often used to encourage people to donate to the Church, and other worthy causes. When looking at our Gospel Reading this Sunday it is understandable why it is common for Priests and Deacons to see the account of the poor Widow giving from the little that she has, as a call for us to be a little more generous when we give to the Church and other good causes. This message is easy for us to find in our Gospel Reading this Sunday and can be summed up as a calling to be more generous with the gifts that God has given us.

I remember a number of years ago when I was a Pastor of a Parish building a Church, I was at a meeting and all in attendance were informed by the Archbishop of a large financial challenge that a Parish in the Archdiocese was facing. The next day I happened to have my quarterly meeting with the Parish Finance Board, and I told them about the financial challenge of this other parish. The Finance Board at my Parish proposed that we donate to the other parish, and so we did. A couple weeks later I received a letter from the Pastor of the other Parish, thanking my Parish for our generous donation. The Pastor went on to state that my Parish was clearly embracing the example of the “Widow’s Mite,” for even in our time of building a Church we were able to find funds to help a parish in need. What the Finance Board of my Parish was able to do, was to see beyond their own needs.

The Widow in our Gospel Reading this Sunday was able to see beyond her own needs and to see the needs of others. The Widow responded to a need, by giving not from her surplus but by giving from her own need. By seeing the message of our Gospel Reading as a message to give more we might miss the point of the “Widow’s mite.” For the Widow saw a need to support the Temple, a place to worship the one true God, and so she gave not of her surplus but from her own need.

It might be helpful to point out that Mark specifies that the two small coins that the Widow gives to the Temple, are bronze mites also known in Greek as *lepta*, and together were worth a quadrans, the smallest Roman coin, worth about six minutes of an average daily wage. Two mites would be worth about \$1.56, in today’s dollars. The funds worth 6 minutes of an average daily wage is not a great deal of money today or 2,000 years ago. The point of the Gospel Reading is not the amount of the donation but the fact that the widow gave from her need and not her surplus. It is the same with the priest who wrote the thank you letter to my Parish all those years ago, it was not the amount that my Parish gave his Parish, it is the fact that we gave from our need, and not our surplus. We were building a Church, and we needed every dime that we had at the time. But the finance board of my Parish saw another need and was willing to help with that need also. That is what the Pastor of the Parish that received the donation from my Parish saw in our donation. I for my part was uncomfortable with the generosity of my Parish being compared to that of the “Widow’s mite.” What the Pastor of the other Parish was trying to say with his letter is that my Parish was embracing the spirit of the “Widow’s mite,” we were thinking beyond our own needs and responding to the needs of others. The donation we made did not stop us from building the new Church or even delay the schedule of building the Church. That is maybe why I was uncomfortable with being compared to the Widow who gave of her want. I tend to assume that the two *lepta* that the Widow gave to the Temple might have been intended to buy bread that day or some other food, and she choose to forgo her daily bread to give to the Temple.

As I look around our Parish, here in Los Alamos, I would have to say that I see families, members of our Parish choosing to give not from their surplus but from their need to help the Parish and other worthy causes. Our families of the Parish are choosing to see beyond their own needs and respond to the needs of others, including the Church. So, in closing, my reflection on the “Widow’s mite” I am not asking for increased donations, but I am thanking each of you for embracing the example of a widow who gave not from her surplus but from her need. May we all be able to see beyond our own needs and respond to the needs of others, with our time, talent and treasure. Thank you and may God bless you and your loved ones.