

Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

Mark 12:41-44

Dear Friends,

Like all of Jesus' teachings, the story of the widow's mite has many levels. At the time of Jesus, the role of the widow was particularly painful and harsh. First of all, she had no rights. The inheritance of the husband would go to his family. The widow was, in fact, kept from returning to her family if anything was owed on her dowry. In some cases, the widow was sold into slavery to make payment on the debt of the dowry.

So for Jesus to point to the widow was a very specific and profound choice. The contrast to the rich donors was extreme.

There is a second point about the widow of the Gospel story and the widow of the first reading feeding Elijah in the Book of Kings. It was not a question of the two desperate women guarding their resources. They were simply dealing with empty pockets or purses. This was closer to the norm in their ordinary lifestyle.

The example of both widows is a clear and powerful example of trust in God. This is the same trust that Jesus has been urging upon his disciples for several chapters now since they acknowledged him as the Messiah. (Mk 8:27) He said that he indeed was he Messiah but his call to fulfillment meant a journey of trust and abandonment on the road to Jerusalem. The disciples did not get it but the blind beggar did. (Mk 10:52) The rich man did not get it (Mk 10:22) but the poor widow did.

One level of today's story contrasting the donation of the rich donors and the poor widow is a call by Jesus to be real, to see with eyes of faith that obliterate the delusion of wealth and possessions that make us think that we are in control. The widow is us. The big difference is that she sees with clarity and deep faith what it means to be a creature. We are all totally and absolutely dependent on God. Each day and each moment is a free gift. The widow understood that as she understood the total loving control of a gracious God. The poor rich donors were happy to share a token of their perceived power and control with God. But in reality, they were poor and weak and the widow was powerful and free in her acceptance of her total dependence on God!