

Pastor's Homily – 32nd Sunday (Year B) – November 11th 2018

So there was this guy who at breakfast asked his wife: “What would you do if I won the lottery?” She replied: “I’d take half of it, and then, I’d leave you.” Really? “OK, great.” he said. “Yesterday I won \$12. ... Here’s \$6. Stay in touch.”

Today we meet a woman in the Gospel who gives 100% of what she has and wins 100% esteem from Jesus. In the Gospel this week we hear of the widow who gave her two small coins, a few cents, to the treasury. Jesus uses her as an example of charity, generosity, and *giving* of oneself: “*This poor widow put in more than all the other contributors, contributing all she had.*”

But before reflecting upon the person Jesus holds up for imitation, I’d like to mention those whom AMERICA holds up for honor and appreciation this weekend. As a nation on this 11th Day of November, we acknowledge all the men and women who have served in the United States Military. Thank you for your great service to our Nation – and to the global community! Happy Veteran’s Day!

As a nation today we recognize the acts of charity, devotion and contribution by those who are “all-in” service to our nation’s armed forces such as Father Zach Callahan and many parishioners among us. Some, like the widow, contribute all they have and make the “ultimate” sacrifice. If Jesus had His way there would be no need for soldiers, no weapons of mass destruction, no terrorists and certainly there would never be war. But our world doesn’t work that way. Soldiers are needed.

And throughout our nation’s history (indeed, the history of the world) men and women have come forward to serve for the benefit (and protection and the freedom) of others. When our soldiers give of themselves for the sake of freedom and justice, to defend and fight for equality and the dignity of the human person, we do need to thank them, as they are – in a tangible way – doing God’s work.

And regardless of the faith that any individual soldier might believe in – or not – we should recognize that what they do, the sacrifice they give, is **a faith offering**, (faith in our nation). It is good to be reminded and appreciative of their giving (their service) every day, and especially on this one day of the year in particular.

But, changing the focus back to the Gospel, did you ever wonder if Jesus really wanted a poor, vulnerable woman to “give her whole livelihood” to the Temple treasury? It’s one thing to give your life for the nation and our values as “*one nation under God*,” but, have you ever suspected that it sounds like the scam-religion propagated by guys in fancy suits who promise that if you send them your money, God will bless you abundantly?

(If the story doesn’t seem to fit with the rest of Jesus’ preaching, perhaps we have gotten it wrong.)

Let us take another look at today’s Gospel passage: In the first part, Jesus issued a public service announcement: “*Beware*. There are people among you who wear extravagant costumes to make you think they are pious, but it is all for themselves. They use their positions to defraud others.” After he said that, Jesus sat down in the “women’s court” of the Temple, the area which included the collection urns — a religious geography indicating that, although women were not allowed into the holier space beyond that court, they could still contribute to the establishment.

Saint Mark tells us that Jesus took his seat like a judge to scrutinize what was happening. He watched the ostentatious wealthy as they let their coins drop noisily into the coffers. Then, he fixed his attention on a widow. When Mark described her as “poor,” he used a word that implies she was bowed down in need. She offered two *lepta*, the smallest coins in circulation. [See a sample of this ‘coin’ → baptismal font] One can well imagine that they were typical of the gifts people donated to beggars like her.

Of all those thronging through the area, she impressed Jesus so much that he pointed her out to his disciples. He wanted them to see what he saw. It is hard to imagine that Jesus spoke with anything but fury as he challenged the disciples to understand what they had just witnessed. He had recently driven-out the merchants from the outer court of the Temple, and now he was condemning the activity in the second court.

Jesus had accused his people of making the outer court a bazaar (a market-place; a shopping mall) rather than a place of encounter with God. Now, he noted that the business of the second court went so far as to *counteract* God's command to care for widows and orphans by inducing the neediest to sacrifice for the affluent. Having spoken his piece, Jesus left the Temple area. That was his last visit to the Temple. As practiced specialists in *missing* the point, the disciples followed him out and then (they) made admiring comments on the wondrous structure of the renovated Temple. Realizing that their values were still skewed, Jesus simply told them that it was all going to fall apart — a statement that underlined the scandal of the widow's offering.

We can make our own connections to televangelists and to our own Catholic church, especially at this time of crisis. The culture of the institution of religion needs reform and renewal for sure. But I'd like to make a more hopeful connection to Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa used to say that she didn't add. She couldn't do addition, she said. She subtracted. But she wasn't talking about mathematical skills. She said: "We can never win at the game of measuring the success of religion and service in numbers because the total number of those in need will always outrun our efforts to catch up with it. Although Mother Teresa's Sisters ---The Missionaries of Charity have helped millions of people, they can't reach everyone.

If, however, we see, as she did, every person to whom we give aid or assist in any way, to be another person *subtracted* from the *mass* of suffering, the "numbers game" changes — especially if we consider each one of them to be a child of God. In trying to feed the world's hungers, we don't have to do everything, but *we can do something*. You don't have to wait to win a lottery – to give away something.

Does the world always take notice of these quiet heroes among us? Nope. (Only occasionally.) But it doesn't matter in the long run. Because people like the widow, (and our Veterans) can very often play out their roles (live their roles) for an audience of "**One**." An audience of One – is good enough.

And HE notices. God notices.

And **that** is all that counts.

Msgr Frank Caldwell