

## 32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Gospel: Mark 12:38-44*

Jesus taught his disciples and said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

### REFLECTION 1: TWO DARING WOMEN

Jesus chose unlikely role models for his disciples to emulate. In a society where children are regarded as the property of their fathers, with no rights or a voice of their own, Jesus pointed to a child and claimed that the kingdom of God belongs to 'such as these.' Today the unlikely role models in our liturgy are two widows.

In Ireland today, a widow is a woman whose husband has died. As her husband's equal partner, she generally inherits his estate. Although her days may be lonely, she is not defenceless, nor has she lost any rights or status in the absence of her spouse. She also enjoys the widow's state pension. However, Jewish widows in Jesus' day were far less fortunate. When her husband died she had no rights or status of her own. She could even be sold into slavery to pay any outstanding debts. Given her precarious status, it is not surprising that the Hebrew word for a widow means somebody who is 'unable to speak' or in Aramaic (Jesus' native language) 'to be in pain'. The widow was the silent helpless one whose lack of legal status left her exposed to oppression and harsh treatment.

The scripture authors have set before us today two widows whose courage in the face of difficulty challenges our own behaviour as Jesus' followers. Neither the widow who offered hospitality to Elijah (First Reading) nor the widow who gave all she had to the temple treasury (Gospel) could be described as prudent. A prudent person would say that 'charity begins at home', so the first widow could have turned Elijah away in order to take care of herself and her son, instead of using all her oil and flour to make a meal for a stranger and a foreigner at that. Similarly, if the widow in the Gospel had been practical and prudent, she could have kept her coins, or at least given only one of them to the temple treasury. But both widows gave all they had.

In their actions, both widows revealed priorities that had little to do with prudence or practicality. It's interesting to know that hospitality, as exercised in the ancient world, placed the care of the guest above one's own needs and desires, so the good widow of Zerephaath tended to Elijah. In giving all she had to live on to the temple, the poor widow in the Gospel indicated that she revered God above all else, even her very life. Generosity to a worthy cause may be foolish in the eyes of the world but often it is the right and Christian thing to do. The actions of these widows remind us of the daring and impracticality we, as Jesus' disciples, are challenged to have. We are to trust and believe so fully in God that we are willing to give all we have, holding back nothing. Maybe some kind of gesture emulating these daring women is what is needed today in Ireland?

## REFLECTION 2:

## 'TO GIVE THAN RECEIVE'

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the focus of today's readings turns to the end times and what is expected of those who are members of the faith community - those who have accepted Jesus as the norm by which they live as Christians. Today's readings offer wisdom and reflections that challenge us.

In Jerusalem in Jesus' day between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women there was the Gate Beautiful. Jesus had gone there to sit quietly after the tense exchanges with the scribes and Pharisees. Now in the Court of the Women there were thirteen collection boxes known as 'trumpets' because they were so shaped. Each box was for a different project, like purchasing wine and oil for the sacrifices in the Temple. Some people contributed considerable sums. Then came a widow and she dropped into one of the trumpets, two small coins known as 'leptons', the smallest of all coins. Yet, Jesus said that her tiny contribution was greater than all the others. While others had thrown in what they could spare from their surplus, the widow had donated everything she had.

One of the sayings attributed to Jesus found only in the Acts of the Apostles is that 'it is a more blessed thing to give rather than receive'. This widow had made a real sacrificial offering donating all she possessed. Real giving has a certain recklessness about us. The widow might have kept one coin, yet she gave all. With us, so often there is some part of our lives, a portion of ourselves that we withhold from the Lord. Something we hold back. We rarely make a full surrender.

We may feel we haven't much in monetary terms or personal gifts to give the Lord in respect of worthy charities craving for our help, but if we give generously and cheerfully from our income, God can do things with it beyond our imaginings. What we do know is that Mark's Jesus will soon be giving of himself completely in his passion and death, so that others may live. Jesus, like the widow and all followers of the Lord, give of themselves totally and completely so that others may have life. Our giving will not change the world overnight, but it will change us and that's a start.