

GOSPEL

Mark 12:38-44

In his teaching Jesus said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets; these are the men who swallow the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'

He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called to his disciples and said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

HOMILY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

8 November 2009 (Excerpt)

At the heart of the Liturgy of the Word this Sunday the 32nd in Ordinary Time we find the figure of the poor widow or, more precisely, we find her gesture when she dropped her last coins into the collection box of the Temple treasury. Thanks to Jesus' attentive look it has become the proverbial "widow's mite" and indeed is synonymous with the generosity of those who give unsparingly the little they possess. However, I would like first of all to emphasize the importance of the atmosphere in which this Gospel episode takes place, that is, the Temple of Jerusalem, the religious centre of the People of Israel and the heart of its whole life. The Temple was the place of public and solemn worship, but also of pilgrimage, of the traditional rites and of rabbinical disputations such as those recorded in the Gospel between Jesus and the rabbis of that time in which, however, Jesus teaches with unique authority as the Son of God. He judges the scribes severely as we have heard because of their hypocrisy: indeed, while they display great piety they are exploiting the poor, imposing obligations that they themselves do not observe. Indeed, Jesus shows his affection for the

Temple as a house of prayer but for this very reason wishes to cleanse it from improper practices; actually he wants to reveal its deepest meaning which is linked to the fulfilment of his own Mystery, the Mystery of his death and Resurrection, in which he himself becomes the new and definitive Temple, the place where God and man, the Creator and his creature, meet.

The episode of the widow's mite fits into this context and leads us, through Jesus' gaze itself, to focus our attention on a transient but crucial detail: the action of the widow, who is very poor and yet puts two coins into the collection box of the Temple treasury. Jesus is saying to us too, just as he said to his disciples that day: Pay attention! Take note of what this widow has done, because her act contains a great teaching; in fact, it expresses the fundamental characteristic of those who are the "living stones" of this new Temple, namely the total gift of themselves to the Lord and to their neighbour; the widow of the Gospel, and likewise the widow in the Old Testament, gives everything, gives herself, putting herself in God's hands for others. This is the everlasting meaning of the poor widow's offering which Jesus praises; for she has given more than the rich, who offer part of what is superfluous to them, whereas she gave all that she had to live on (cf. Mk 12: 44), hence she gave herself.

Dear friends, starting with this Gospel icon I would like to meditate briefly on the mystery of the Church, the living Temple of God, and thereby pay homage to the memory of the great Pope Paul VI who dedicated his entire life to the Church. The Church is a real spiritual organism that prolongs in space and time the sacrifice of the Son of God, an apparently insignificant sacrifice in comparison with the dimensions of the world and of history but in God's eyes crucial. As the Letter to the Hebrews says and also the text we have just heard Jesus' sacrifice offered "once" sufficed for God to save the whole world (cf. Heb 9: 26, 28), because all the Love of the Son of God made man is condensed in that single oblation, just as all the widow's love for God and for her brethren is concentrated in this woman's action; nothing is lacking and there is nothing to add. The Church, which is ceaselessly born from the Eucharist,

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from Jesus' gift of self, is the continuation of this gift, this superabundance which is expressed in poverty, in the all that is offered in the fragment. It is Christ's Body that is given entirely, a body broken and shared in constant adherence to the will of its Head.

I am glad that guided by your Bishop's Pastoral Letter you are examining in depth the Eucharistic nature of the Church, this Church which the Servant of God Paul VI loved passionately and sought with all his might to make understood and loved. Let us reread his *Pensiero alla morte*, the part where, in the last section, he speaks of the Church. "I could say", he writes, "that I have always loved her... and that it seems to me I have lived for her and for nothing else; but I would like the Church to know it". These are the accents of a palpitating heart and he continues: "Lastly, I would like to understand her fully, in her history, in her divine plan, in her final destiny, in her complex, total and unitary composition, in her human and imperfect consistence, in her adversities and her sufferings, in her weakness and in the wretchedness of so many of her children, in her less sympathetic aspects and in her eternal aspiration to fidelity, love, perfection and charity. The Mystical Body of Christ". "I would like", the Pope continues, "to embrace, greet her and love her in every being of whom she is made up, in every Bishop and priest who serves and guides her, in every soul who lives and illustrates her; I would like to bless her". Moreover,

his last words were to her, as to the bride of his whole life: "And what shall I say to the Church, to whom I owe everything and whom was mine? May God's Blessings be upon you; may you be aware of your nature and your mission; may you have a sense of humanity's true and profound needs; and walk in poverty, in other words free, strong and in love with Christ".

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Why is giving "a great deal" seemingly less interesting to Jesus than the woman who gave only a little but was her "everything"?



Heart: St Paul VI expresses beautifully his love for the Bride of Christ, the Church. How do you feel about the Church? Would you say that you "love her"?



Hands: What is one way that you feel you could give more of yourself to God? What could you do this week to become a "living stone"?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.