

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Nov 24th 2014

Although we do celebrate today an important memorial, the gospel reading is so rich in meaning, that I will focus my reflection on it, rather than on the memorial itself. Besides it being a lesson in generosity, the poor widow's gesture is a significant lesson in trust, namely, a two-dimensional trust.

First dimension: trusting that she could live without those two coins, her whole livelihood. This is so contrary to our trusting in our various sources of security (which is precisely what mammon of Mt. 6:24 means): savings, insurance policies, social connections... our safety net, our whole livelihood. A first dimension of her trust.

Second dimension: perhaps even more important, trusting that her contribution was significant. Granted, it was peanuts in the temple's budget. But it was not the amount, it was her stance that was so important: not just giving of what she had, but truly giving of what she was, namely, a faithful Israelite contributing to the temple worship. And the Lord praised her.

The scene is so reminiscent of an anecdote in Mother Teresa's life, as narrated by herself:

I was once walking down the street and a beggar came to me and said, "Mother Teresa, everybody's giving to you. Today, for the whole day, I got only twenty-nine paise and I want to give it to you". I thought for a moment: if I take it, he will have nothing to eat tonight; and if I don't take it, it will hurt him. So I put out my hand and took the money. I have never seen such a joy on anybody's face as I saw on his—that a beggar, too, could give to Mother Teresa. It was a big sacrifice for that poor man who'd been sitting in the sun all day and had only received twenty-nine paise. It was beautiful: twenty-nine paise is such a small amount and I can get nothing with it, but as he gave it up and I took it, it became like thousands because it was given with so much love. [Mother Teresa. *A Simple Path*, Ballastine books, New York 1995, pp. 99-100]

Our own contributions would hardly make a dent in God's kingdom's budget, but giving of what we have—and more importantly of what we are—is not irrelevant at all. Sometimes the awareness of the limited effect of our contribution can trick us into thinking that it is not worth doing. Knowing that we will not solve all the problems of all the people could have the lethal effect of freezing us into inactivity. The poor widow did not allow that to happen to her. Can we trust that our contribution is relevant, even if it does not solve all the problems of all the people?

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