

32nd SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B - 2006
“The Widow’s Fortune.”

What do the blind man, Bartimaeus, the scribe of last Sunday’s gospel, and the widow of today’s gospel all have in common? Or, I could ask, what do the disciples of Jesus, the Pharisees and the scribes of today’s gospel all have in common? Bartimaeus said to Jesus, *“I want to see,”* and his faith saved him. The scribe who asked Jesus which were the greatest commandments praised Jesus’ answer and was not far from the kingdom of God. And the poor widow gave everything she had to her God and neighbor. Each was on the journey of faith, and recognized Jesus for who he was. That is what they had in common. The disciples, the Pharisees and scribes just didn’t get it. Jesus was a mystery to the disciples and an enemy of the religious leaders.

St. Mark is masterful in his way of getting people to look at things a new way, to see reality with a new set of eyes. Mark uses unexpected members of his cast of characters to reveal to us the message of Jesus; not the big names like Peter, James and John, or the religious leaders of the temple whose names are in lights on the marquee of the theater of the gospel like we would expect, but the minor players whose names fly by in the credits at the end of the movie so fast you can’t read them. A blind beggar, a lone scribe, and a poor widow. Mark says, *“Look at these little people. They get it. They understand who Jesus is. They show us what being a disciple of Jesus looks like.”*

As the poor widow approached one of the seven large trumpet-shaped receptacles she couldn’t help but think of the people just ahead of her who had put in their contributions. As they poured in their coins, the rattling sound they made indicated they had put in a lot. People even turned to look

to see who they were. No one would notice her. From her purse, she pulled out the only two coins she had, realizing that the little tinkling sound they would make would reveal that she hadn't given hardly anything. But, with head bowed in humility, she put them in, all she had. Tinkle, tinkle, and it was over. And she walked away, wishing she could have done more. As she glanced up, she saw Jesus sitting there. He smiled at her. "*What could that be all about?*" she asked herself as she left the temple.

It is not by accident that this widow giving her all is the last story of Mark's Gospel before he introduces the detailed story of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. This simple woman gave everything she had to live on out of love of God and love of neighbor, just like Jesus, who was about to give everything, even his very life, out of love of his Father and us. As this simple woman lived out the two great commandments by giving her two coins, Jesus lived them out by giving his life. In her humble generosity, she models for us a true disciple, a true holy person, who lives in the spirit of the Jesus. If the people in the temple noticed the widow's gift, they probably scoffed at it compared to theirs. (*They would scoff at Jesus, too.*) But Jesus saw the meaning of the gift she gave. The two coins reveal her faith and the gratitude of her heart. And isn't that what Jesus wants more than anything, our hearts? She was willing to give it all. She gave everything. The rich who gave their money for show only gave their money. Their hearts weren't in it. She gave from her substance, from her very being. We call this the story the "Widow's Mite." It would be more accurate to call it the "Widow's Fortune," as she had given more than all the rest. What a different way of looking at things! I said Mark was a master at it.

What a wonderful story as we look at the spirit of our hearts as we enter the second week of addressing stewardship here in our parish. Of

course, when we think of stewardship we think of money. But that isn't really the case, not deep down. The widow's fortune was the condition of her heart, her faith, her hope and her love. From that came her generous gift. As we have said so often here in the parish, if we have money problems, our problem isn't money. It is the condition of our hearts. Stewardship, as an approach to parish support, appeals to what is best about us, our faith, our hope and our love. From that comes the generous spirit that has allowed us to do so much over the years. Many think we are a wealthy parish. Well, we are, but not in terms of dollars, as compared to some other parishes. But we do have generous people. Our goal is to give 5% of our household income to the parish and the other 5% to other good causes we want to support.

By the way, we are not asking you to give all you have to live on, like the widow did. Some scripture scholars see in this story a criticism of the temple for taking money from the widow they should be caring for. Jesus had just warned the people to beware of the scribes "*who devour the houses of widows.*" We set aside close to 10% of our income to help those in emergency situations. If you are in trouble, let us know. But if you are not, please help support our parish. As Mike and Shirley said last week, a steward is one who looks after the resources of someone else. Well, all we have is from God in one way or the other, and, as stewards, we must use the gifts we have in service to others as well as self.

We do not promise that if you give financially, you will get back more gave, like we are really giving to receive more in return. But I do believe that in giving to others, our hearts change. They are transformed and gradually become more generous. And as they open, we begin to see more clearly the gifts that are given to us, things, people, opportunities we may

not have noticed before as gifts. I know some people who simple cannot accept gifts, because they think they have to reciprocate. They don't want to be indebted to anyone. Well, whether we like it or not, we are indebted to God for everything.

I think the best givers are those who can accept gifts. They cannot help but have grateful hearts. And a grateful heart cannot help but be a humble heart. And a humble heart is a generous heart.