



## Sermon 32nd Sunday of the Year

### The Widow's Mite

I'm sure that you will have heard about the credit crunch. We can hardly have escaped it, really. The papers, the TV and Radio have all been churning out huge amounts about the near catastrophe that befell the economy about a year or so so.

Since then, we have been pouring huge amounts of money into the economy. In fact, we have been printing it. I came across a phrase in the last few months which describes this process: 'quantitative easing.' This, as far as I understand it, is a nuanced version of printing new money in the hope that we might somehow get out of the hole in which we find ourselves.

Essentially, it seems that the reason we got into this mess in the first place is because of bad debt. Bad debt incurred by people who wanted good things, but wanted them, NOW. Not prepared to wait, to save, or to work out that the best things in life are free. As a result, our economy has been brought almost to its knees by people in love with money.

In that light, we turn to the story of two widows; one in the first book of Kings who gives her last morsel of food to a stranger and another who, in today's Gospel, gives her last pennies to the Temple.

You might think that they were completely mad. Here they are, giving the very last of their worldly goods away. Most people would think that these two had taken leave of their senses. In the first reading, the widow is hastening her own end. In the Gospel, the widow holds nothing back.

Or are they right after all? What they both have in common is that they have made the same choice. While the cynical, careful and provident Pharisees give only what they have left over, the widows give their all. And to whom do they give it. In absolute trust, in total faith, in great love, and buoyed up by hope, they give what they have to God.

What might seem utterly reckless, even feckless, to us, is in fact an act of generosity. These two women have shown by their actions that they truly love God.

Jesus naturally commends the women in the Temple over against the Pharisees. They are, after all, secure. They have more than enough money to get by. They don't have to live from hand to mouth. They can afford to give, and give lavishly, into the Temple coffers, much more than the poor widow can ever hope to give. The difference between them and her is that they have a safety net. The woman has chosen to rely totally, simply, and utterly upon God's providence.

How often did Jesus try to drum this lesson into his disciples? He talked of sparrows falling, of hairs counted, of trust in God. How difficult it must have been to get this message across. Here, in today's Gospel, we see it lived out in this woman.

She has learned something that the Pharisees clearly could not. She has learned to trust in a God who is lavish in his gifts to us. The God in whom we believe and in whom we should

trust is one who is utterly faithful to his people. In the first instance it is to Israel, whom he calls and with whom he enters into a covenant, a sacred relationship. He has given us Jesus, who also gives himself on the Cross and as food for our pilgrimage.

The woman in today's Gospel has grasped what the Pharisees have not. She has understood God's love for us. The Pharisees, passing themselves off as holy men, probably truly thinking that they were holy men, have missed the point of a very simple lesson. Prayer is empty unless it is followed up by acts of love, generosity and charity.

Jesus comments on the widow's gift at the Temple knowing that he himself will shortly make his life an offering to the Father, making of his death upon the cross a self-sacrifice. He will shortly give everything, absolutely everything, so that everybody can be restored to God's friendship. Foolish? It might seem so. But done in absolute loving trust in his Heavenly Father.

The clear lesson, then, is that we have a choice. To we seek to live with a safety net, a sort of 'in God we trust, but let's make sure that there is money in the bank' sort of way. Or do we take a deep breath, take the risk and dive in to the life of the disciple, as he calls us to?

It's not easy, to be sure. But perhaps we need to learn from the widow in the Temple. Perhaps our desire for financial security, our desire to surround ourselves with material comforts, makes us reluctant to throw our lot in with the widow. Perhaps, dare I say it, we are more like the Pharisees than we care to admit.

There is a warning then to all of us, clergy and lay alike. Let us resist the temptation to self aggrandisement, let us resist the temptation to hold back, let us learn from the widows who, in their generosity, gave their all to God, who will not let them down.

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