

# Father John's Gospel Reflection



**GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

**Thirty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
(Mark 12:38-44)**

*This poor widow has put more in than all who contributed.*

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 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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

1. Today we seem to be obsessed by image, and it has become the most important feature of political leadership. Jesus present us with a challenge to this culture, warns us not to be taken in by such antics.
2. Jesus highlights the importance of intention and motivation- let us ask ourselves "why do we do what we do?" God looks into the "heart."
3. This passage leaves us with difficult and perplexing questions- eg Do I give money to have my church air-conditioned, or give money to a school in war ravaged South Sudan?

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Jesus, once again, denouncing the scribes, this time, not in terms of their belief, but in economic terms. They are like so many abnormally rich people, arrogant, self-important and self-aggrandising. Since his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, there is hardly a group in Jerusalem with leadership responsibilities, who have not heard these hard words of Jesus, condemning them all.

That Mark mentions widows should come as no surprise. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, widows are quintessentially, those in most need- those for whom compassionate and caring justice should be metered out. Deuteronomy 14:28-29, also lists aliens, orphans as well as widows as those who need support. For it is their poverty that brings them closer to God. (1 Kings 17)

Jesus says that the widow "gives more" than the wealthy, because what she gives is of a higher proportion of her total wealth. That Jesus praises the woman is a summary of the whole Gospel- for God looks at the heart, at the interior intention and its readiness to give generously. Jesus here challenges convention by praising the generosity of the poor over the pomposity of the rich. The widow is humble and self-abnegating. She may not know it, but she personifies the Beatitudes, as the "poor in spirit" and "humble of heart." Furthermore, Jesus condemns the scribes not just for their indifferent wealth, but for their ostentatious robes, their loud prayers and their insistence on being first. This makes them deaf to the demands of Jesus, for they "gobble up" or "devour" the house of the widow. Looking back at Mark 4:4 those who "gobble up" are Satan, and here Jesus uses the same word to describe the Scribes.

It would seem that Jesus' judgment of the scribes is based, at least, in part, on their inner motivation- but how does one judge such a thing? For Mark, it is always the kingdom of God that takes priority- and is valued rather than human kingdoms – wealth, property, investments and power.

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