

Greetings to you! Our theme for this morning's meditation is "A generous spirit". When it comes to the question of giving to the church or for the work of God what kind of spirit do we have? Very often our attitude towards giving is motivated by our own selfish desires rather than a truly generous spirit. The readings for today challenge us to the contrary to give freely even as God in Christ has given us.

In the gospel of St. Mark, Jesus confronts the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law who liked to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the market places. They also desired the most important seats in the synagogue and the places of honor at banquets. The Pharisees used these festive robes which was not an everyday garment but a celebratory robe to attract attention to themselves. The teachers of the law wore these long fringed garments that almost touched the ground. With this robe the people would identify them as teachers of the law and therefore were greeted in the market place. The point is that they wanted attention. They also took the most important seats in the synagogue. These seats were in the front of the ark where the scrolls were kept facing the congregation. The point here again was that they wanted to be noticed by people. They always sought the places of honor.

Jesus also condemns them for devouring widows homes. These widows were wealthy patrons and so the teachers of the law made a beeline to these homes. The teachers of the law were paid poor wages and therefore they were dependent on the generosity of wealthy patrons and so under these circumstances the widows were exploited. Jesus criticizes these teachers of the law for they were only concerned about themselves and how to make money. There is a note of warning for all the teachers of the law.

Jesus then sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put into the temple treasury; He was observing each one as they put their money in. Some put in large amounts displaying to everyone present the amount they were putting in. As he was observing, a poor widow came in and put in two small copper coins worth only a few cents. Jesus was moved by the generous spirit of the poor widow. Jesus called his disciples and said, "Truly I tell you this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty put in everything—all she had to live on." The temple treasury was located in the court of the women which was the first area in the temple and beyond this the women could not go. It contained 13 trumpet shaped receptacles for contributions brought by worshippers. Each of these trumpets was allocated for a specific task and six of them were for free will offerings. Mark tells us that many people put in large amounts and these could have been gold or silver coins. The copper coin that the widow gave was the smallest denomination of currency and was known as the *lepton* in Greek. A *lepton* was probably equivalent to about 6 minutes of wages of a daily laborer. It was almost next to nothing. It would be like putting two one rupee coins in today's world.

All those who put in large amounts went away with a sense of having done something good and feeling proud about it. But the poor widow had only two copper coins. There was nothing else left with her but she dropped in whatever she had. Jesus knew that the woman had given her everything. It was total commitment. She gave out of her poverty and put everything she had to live on. There was no holding back in the manner she gave. She gave sacrificially because she lived her life as a life of service.

Jesus uses this widow's offering to teach us about the Lord's service, whether it is our money, or time or talents. We are called to give them all to God. We are encouraged to pay a tithe so that we may give to the Lord as he has freely given us. However when we give we think that we are giving to the church as an institution rather than to God and because of this attitude we reluctantly give our tithes. Our attitude must be that we are giving to God as an act of gratitude for all the blessings that he has blessed us with, including jobs and salaries. Paul cites the example of the Macedonians who gave graciously saying, "For I testify they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability entirely on their own (2 Corinthians 8:3). What is the measure we use to give God? Do we give a measure that is well shaken and pressed? Or are we miserly in giving to God? God calls us to a life of sacrificial giving. May God help us to be gracious and to give with a generous spirit.