

## **Reading:** Mark 12:41-44

### **CONTEXT OF THE READING**

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent we focus on discipleship and the practical consequences thereof especially with regards to our financial giving. Our eyes have to be on the Lord with everything we do, say or think – not depending on ourselves, or our wealth but on God alone.

Our reading portrays a true disciple whose practical witness we cannot ignore.

To understand the context we should first focus on the verses that precede our reading especially verses 38-40 which gives us an indication of what discipleship is not about namely:

<sup>38</sup>As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, <sup>39</sup>and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. <sup>40</sup>They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”

From verses 40 to 44 Jesus uses the widow’s financial giving to illustrate true discipleship.

**In the Old Testament** legislation has always been concerned for widows and, together with the fatherless and strangers, made special provision for them. Even in pre-Mosaic times there was recognition of the predicament of the childless widow and arrangements made for her and these were formally enjoined under Moses.

As widows are often overlooked by men, God has a peculiar concern for them and kindness to them was commended as one of the marks of true religion. The oppression and injury of widows, on the other hand, would incur dire punishment.

In the New Testament this practice continued. It was the duty of society to provide for the widow. We read that in James chapter 1:27 that “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Even if widows were left comparatively well-off, they needed to be protected from the unscrupulous. One of the things that Jesus condemned in some Pharisees was that they ‘devoured widows’ houses’. More than often widows were left in poverty. We read in Acts that in the early church special provision was being made for the widows.

Jesus sat down across the treasury. The treasury referred to the thirteen trumpet-shaped offertory boxes placed in the Court of the Women in the Temple into which the Jews cast their offerings. Jesus looked with great interest as people put in their offerings.

He saw how the rich put in a lot of money. But then a poor widow came. The Greek word for poor, **πτωχός *ptōchós***, meant poor and helpless. It was usually contrasted with another Greek word *pénēs*, which meant one who may be poor but earns his bread by daily labour. So this widow had basically no income.

Jesus saw how she put in two very small copper coins. In the Greek text it says it was two **κοδράντης *kodrántēs***; which was the smallest Roman coin, worth

1/4 assarion or 1/64 denarius. Jesus is making the point that she literally put in everything that she owned.

Then Jesus said to his disciples that of all the people, who put in money into the treasury box, the widow has put in the most. Because everyone gave out of their wealth, while she gave everything she had.

The message is clear: it is not how much we give but with what attitude we give?

Amen

### **REFLECTION ON THE READING**

The text verse for the sermon is verse 44: "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Is it a coincidence that on the third Sunday of Lent the Church has to reflect on their discipleship in a practical way and that we also have our Annual Stated meeting on this day this year? I do not think that this is a coincidence. God is trying to tell us something about our discipleship.

It is also no coincidence that God is speaking to us as trustees in this congregation when we look back on the past year and reflect on our financial givings to the Church. And I do not want to be the bearer of bad news, but I will just say it. For the second time in two years we are facing a shortfall in our income, which means that the Church cannot do what it is supposed to be doing, reaching out with God's Gospel to all people. As trustees we are responsible for the "treasury" and if we cannot even meet our expenses through our giving, then we have to all think again about our priorities and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

If the widow is a true example of the right attitude of following and discipleship, then I am afraid we all fall a wee bit short.

I wonder how many of us really know that we are trustees and that we have to be good stewards of God's money, making sure that the congregation meets its budget. The Church is not about making profits. The Church is not about getting rich and wealthy, because that only leads to complacency and a sense of we do not need God.

No the Church just needs to cover all the expenses of doing God's work in this Parish. And you will also hear that the shortfall is not due to overspending. On the contrary – the expenses were less than what was budgeted.

There is thus no excuse for us. We have to face the Lord and honestly answer the question: was my giving in proportion to my attitude towards God? Was my giving from my heart or was it just another task to organise like my golf or gym membership?

Our givings are for the work of the Church in general to do its work in the Parish, to take care of the needy in body and spirit, for the upkeep of the buildings so that worship can be conducted, for giving to charitable causes, the maintenance of the national Church and yes, to also look after God's chosen servants.

And please do not tell your children what a dad once told his wee boy:

There was a wee boy in a village who went to his minister and said: When I win the lottery, I will give you everything that I have won. The minister was quite taken aback by the young lad's generosity. So he said: Thank you, son, but why

do you want to give it all to me? The young boy answered: because my dad said you are the poorest preacher he has ever heard!

May we all go from here and reflect on our attitudes of giving in a big way and ask the Lord to help us in the next years to come! And let us not forget: No gift of love is too small to count!

Amen