

32<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B  
A RADICAL KENOSIS

*“I tell you solemnly this 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” (Mark 12: 43-44)*

**Understanding Generosity:** There is a misconception around the act of giving or being charitable. Many people think that one must be rich or have enough before he is generous with those who have less or are in need. In this case, one is only bound to give after he has taken care of his own needs and have some leftover. The beautiful stories of the two generous widows in the First Reading (1Kings 17: 10-16) and the Gospel (Lk. 12: 38-40) have demonstrated that this view is objectionable. The widows, among other things, have taught us that one does not have to be rich to give. Generosity is not a thing of the pocket, wallet, or account balance. Generosity is a thing of the heart. It is faith made manifest in practical life.

**The Widows, Our Heroines:** The life of a widow in Israel, at the time of Jesus, and before, was a very difficult and miserable one: a widow had no right to inheritance, they relied on their children, relatives and charity of the community for survival. They were often oppressed and denied justice. They were treated with humiliating social regulations, for example, the Levites, the priestly family, were forbidden to marry widows (Lev. 21: 14) They were prone to abuses and were often lonely and sad. In many cultures today, widows are still being treated in similar ways. It is therefore very remarkable to see the generosity of these widows the Church presents to us. They are real sources of inspiration and challenge. These widows are our heroines today. What is common in these stories is that both widows gave out “all they had to live on” without any physical assurance of their next meal; they offered their gifts in faith. This is radical kenosis – an emptying and an outpouring of self in generosity and love.

**It Maybe A Mite, But It Is Mighty:** Jesus had just finished denouncing the hypocrisy and the pretence of the piety of the Pharisees, who “devour the houses of widows” (Mark 12: 40) when He went to sit quietly “opposite the treasury and watched people putting money into the treasury” (Mark 12: 41). The treasury must have been the thirteen collection boxes, called “The trumpets” because it was so shaped. Each was labelled according to its purpose. Jesus observed how people put money into them. Of all those who contributed on the day, Jesus was struck by the gift of the widow, who put in “two small coins, the equivalent of a penny” (Mark 12: 42). The coins were called “Lepta” or “Lepton”, which means “thin one.” It was the smallest of all the Jewish coins, and it was worth one-fortieth of one pence or one four-hundredth of a shekel. So, you can see how meagre the economic value of this offering was. Jesus called His disciples aside and made a declaration and commendation that “this widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury” even though among the contributors on the day were also the rich, “who put in a great deal” (Mark 12: 41). One can imagine how

startled the disciples must have been at such commendation. Even to our minds today, we cannot comprehend it at face value. So, what is the point here?

***It Is Not In The Quantity But The Quality:*** Why was the “great deal” contribution of the rich smaller than the widow’s “two small coins”? Jesus explained that the other contributors “put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything, all she had to live on”. The others put in from their surplus. They still had much left over to live on. But, like the widow of Zarephath in the First Reading, who shared her last handful of meals and a little oil with the prophet of God, this widow offered her last coins, “all she had to live on.” The first difference lies in what each had left. The widow’s gift was reckless, radical, and sacrificial. The others were gifts of convenience and comfort. The second difference lies in the intention. Only Jesus can see both the external act of offering to the treasury and the internal disposition of the donor. The external may be enormous in terms of numerical and economic value but the internal disposition, hidden from the eyes of men, is deceptive because the intention is to gain human appraisal and commendation. The appreciation of Jesus attests to the fact that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). God judges the motives and not just the external actions of men (1 Samuel 16: 7). It is not the quantity of the gift but the quality of the heart that matters to God. This St. Paul tells us that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9: 7). One who gives sacrificially with joy in thanksgiving to God without any desire for human praises and rewards.

***Gifts of Faith:*** The offerings of the widows were gifts of faith. The widow in the First Reading trusted in the words of the God of Israel, spoken by the Prophet Elijah: “Jar of meal shall not be spent, the jug of oil shall not be emptied, before the day the Lord sends rain upon the face of the earth (1 Kings 17: 14). She believed and put her faith in the Word of God. And so it came to pass, she never ran out of food. The widow in the Gospel had no idea where her next coins or meal would come from, but she simply trusted. Her gift was faith in action: faith, for here, is believing that God will certainly provide without knowing when and how He will do it. It is not her business to know, but she must act as her faith leads – to simply trust. She trusted completely that God will provide her needs according to His riches in glory (Phil. 4: 19).

***Generosity is Both A Duty And A Choice.*** Everyone has a duty and choice to be generous because everyone has received something from the Lord and therefore, everyone has something to offer. St. Pope John Paul II once wrote: “No one is so poor that he has nothing to give.” Tobit advised his son, Tobias, “Give alms in proportion to the amount you have: if you have much, give much; if you have little, do not be afraid to give something from the little you have” (Tobit 4: 8). Generosity does not depend on the size of the pocket but the largeness of the heart. It has nothing to do with the balance in our bank accounts but has everything to do with the balance of the love in our hearts.

***Dear friends,*** the radical and reckless nature of the generosity of these widows reflects the lavished love that God, the Father, has for us. These heroines have challenged us to scrutinize the motives of our charity; the quality of our gifts and the attitudes with which we make our offerings to God and others. They have reminded us that in the divine

calculation, the smallest becomes the greatest when offered in faith and with love. May the Lord help us to give even when it hurts.