

Hearing today's gospel, what is it that Jesus wants us to do? We are told that he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the faithful give their offerings. Many wealthy people came and gave large sums of money. Then a widow comes and puts in a fraction of what the wealthy gave, just two small coins, but it was all that she had. Jesus holds her up as an example, and tells us that, in fact, she put in more than the wealthy did, regardless of the actual amount that was given, because she gave from her need, whereas they had only given from their surplus.

So again, what is the point of Jesus' teaching; what does he want us to do? On one extreme, one might conclude that Jesus is telling us to do what the widow did: give everything we own. Do not just give out of what is left over after taking care of yourself, but give everything. We can see, however, when we look at the gospel as a whole, that Jesus does not demand this of everyone. In fact, he only demanded it of one person, the rich young man who was told that it was the only thing that he lacked, that he had to sell what he had, give it to the poor, and then follow Jesus. But throughout the gospel, we see commerce, we see people buying food and owning property and anointing Jesus' head with expensive perfume. Jesus does not demand that we give away everything that we have the way that the widow did.

But once we hear that, there is the opposite temptation of largely ignoring this episode. "The widow gave all that she had, and good for her, but Father said I don't have to do that. I'll decide for myself how much I'm going to give, and whatever I

decide, that is enough. No one can tell me differently.” Such an attitude fails to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and it has been given to us so that we can have the privilege of cooperating with His plan, not so that we can do whatever we feel like doing. All of our decisions must be accompanied with the prayer: Lord, may your will be done.

So what does Jesus want us to do, if not necessarily give everything we have, but also not just ignore the example of the poor widow? What we can all learn from this gospel, what the widow has to teach us, is that Jesus wants us to place all of our trust in Him, and not in the things of this world. If one were to tell the wealthy people of Jesus’ day to put all of their money into the Temple treasury, they would no doubt say, “I can’t. I need it.” It is that attitude, “I *need* money, I *need* material things, I *have* to have them or I will be devastated, I will be unhappy,” that keeps them from being held up by Jesus as an example for the rest of us, even though they put in large sums of money into the treasury.

The temptation to put our trust in material things and in the things of this life is constant, and it can rear its ugly head at any time. We may think that we are firmly rooted in our trust in God, that we have achieved a level of healthy detachment, living in the world but not of the world. Then, suddenly, our job is threatened, or our health declines. And we find that our peace is gone, our spirit is unsettled, and we view the future with worry and dread. It is in times like that when we must ask ourselves,

“How much had I really been trusting in God, and how much had I been trusting in the world, trusting in material things for my peace and my happiness? God did not change from yesterday to today, His promise to always be with me has not been taken back. So if God has not changed, why am I troubled now in this new situation, when I was not before? Where had I been placing my trust?”

We live in the world, but not of the world, meaning that we do engage, we do strive to build up the Kingdom of God by loving our neighbor, fighting evil, feeding the hungry, preaching the gospel because we are in the world, but relying only on God for our security and our happiness because we are not of the world, we are of God. God will never abandon the world because it is His beloved creation, and one day, He will return, and evil, suffering and death will be conquered forever.

In the meantime, we use the things He has given us in this life to help serve Him.

That means being prudent, taking care of ourselves and our families in order to have the freedom and the means to pursue holiness. Trusting in God does not mean relying for Him to somehow pay the mortgage or buy the groceries while we give away all our money. But it does mean that we remember that material things are just that, only things, to be used to serve God’s kingdom and not to provide us with our happiness.

We are made for God, so only God can make us happy. May we continue to strive to detach ourselves from the things of this world, so that we can be free to use them as God sees fit, and be ready to give whatever He asks for the sake of His Kingdom.