

The Gospel selection today is the story traditionally called the “Widow’s mite,” named for the value of the two coins she puts in the Temple collection. She donated about one cent, about 1/64th of a day’s wage at the time. It would a wonderful Gospel for Stewardship Sunday, wouldn’t it? I suspect that many parishes are using for that today. Just think of the possibilities for eloquent and lengthy sermons on church collections and donations. On the other hand, maybe longer is not better in this instance. A visitor to our parish one Sunday advised that I would be much more successful if I could guarantee homilies no longer than five minutes. “After all,” he said, “if you haven’t struck oil in five minutes, stop boring!”

In the Gospel story, Jesus contrasts the probably sizeable donations of the wealthy with a widow’s “two small copper coins worth a few cents,” about 1/64th of a daily wage for a laborer at the time. Because it was all she had to live on, her contribution was worth more than the more substantial gifts. The gifts of the wealthy were not worthless. The Gospel doesn’t say that. The Gospel does not say that they weren’t generous. It’s not that much good would be done with their large donations. But the gift of the widow is more highly valued in the eyes of God because of the trust in God that she obviously had to have in order to be able to make this gift. The wealthy, giving from their abundance, still have a lot left, still had even more than enough to live on. The widow’s gift is from a human point of

view rather stupid. From a divine point of view, it is a supreme act of worship, because it represents complete trust in God. True worship of God is always more a matter of the heart than of the head. The standard of measurement is not how much one gives to the work of God, but what kind of an act of worship it is, what kind of trust it implies.

We don't know what became of that widow, but there is another widow mentioned in the first reading today, taken from the First Book of Kings. She also has come to the end of the means she has to support her life and the life of her son. She has just enough, she says, for one last meal. The prophet Elijah with some chutzpah wants something of the little she has left. He promises that the food will last. What she does is stupid from a human point of view, like trading a family asset for a handful of magic beans. But she does trust in God, for the prophet after all is speaking for God, so it's God who is making the promise. And she is not disappointed for there was enough for three people for a year. Her gift to the prophet represents complete trust in the God who alone gives life.

The last three Sundays of the Church year traditionally focus on the "last things." This emphasis on "last things" begins on the Feast of All Saints and continues through the Feast of Christ the King on the Last Sunday of the Church year and includes even first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new Church year. In Mark's Gospel the story of the "Widow's Mite" leads into a sermon Jesus gives the disciple on the Last Things, while

they are sitting there in front that magnificent Temple. After this sermon, Jesus begins his passion and death. The donation of the widow prepares us for the gift that Jesus is about to make for our salvation. In second Corinthians Paul puts it this way: “REMEMBER HOW GENEROUS THE LORD JESUS WAS; HE WAS RICH, BUT HE BECAME POOR FOR YOUR SAKE, TO MAKE YOU RICH OUT OF HIS POVERTY. SO NOW FINISH THE WORK AND LET THE RESULT BE WORTHY, AS FAR AS YOU CAN AFFORD IT.” You know, I like Paul’s qualification: “As far as you can afford it.” Now, doesn’t that seems much more reasonable? There is a limit to how much I have to give. I can do that. But the example of the widows of today’s reading? Complete trust? Everything I have to live on? That surely cannot be realistic. Wouldn’t that be stupid from a human point of view?

The last things of Mark’s Gospel and our lives prompt us to ask about the accounting we shall have to give of our management of God’s gifts. God’s desire is for genuineness in our relationship with him. What Jesus praised widow’s genuine devotion to God. The ways we spend and invest our money reveals how genuine we are in our values. And I suppose that’s what makes me so nervous . We say often enough: “Put your money where your mouth is!” It’s really equivalent to saying, “Put your yourself and whatever you have where your heart is.” Would Jesus praise me for what I give? That’s the question for our reflection and meditation today.