



Come and See!

November 11, 2018

The Word...

He sat down opposite the treasury
and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury.
Many rich people put in large sums.
A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.
Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them,
"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more
than all the other contributors to the treasury.
For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth,
but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."
(Mk 12:38-44)

Pondering the Word...

This passage is probably very familiar; it's often called "The Widow's Mite" (mite meaning a very small sum of money). We hear of the widow's sacrifice, giving out of her poverty contrasted with the wealthy contributors, giving from their surplus. Sometimes this story is referenced when we're asked to "dig deep" as this widow did, to contribute to some cause. That's all well and good, but if we fail to "dig deeper," we could miss the more important lessons.

It might seem that the focus is on material poverty versus wealth, but Jesus is not passing judgment on the wealthy contributors. They may be good and generous people. The more important aspect of poverty in this story is the widow's spiritual poverty—her total reliance on God for her wellbeing—that is the greater sacrifice. The large sums dropped into the treasury by the wealthy and the lengthy prayers recited by the scribes ring hollow when compared to her true show of faith.

Another aspect that might be overlooked is the widow's dignity, her desire to be seen as part of the community. Although the Torah emphasizes the care of widows, these women and their children are vulnerable and looked down upon. By adding her pittance to the treasury, she asserts for herself the right to be recognized. While hers is truly an act of faith in God, she is also making a statement: "I am here. I am a contributing member. I am not invisible, nor am I going away." I like to think she sees Jesus observing her. I like to think she knows that, to him, her contribution matters the most.

Living the Word...

Before we go digging deep into our pockets, how about if we dig deeper into our hearts? Ask yourself: What would "hurt" me to give up, or better yet, what am I willing to sacrifice in order to let God be in control? For some, material wealth can be the stumbling block, but for many people, I'd venture to say control is a bigger issue. Think about selecting something small, some situation that has you tied up, heels dug in, and ready for battle. Consciously turn to God and hand the whole thing over to him. Do it for real, not for show. Every time it creeps back in, take some deep breaths and say, "Here you go, God. You've got this." Do it as many times as you need to and see what happens. Trust God, for goodness sakes. He's got this.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Nov 12: *“And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, ‘I am sorry,’ you should forgive him.” And the Apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”* (Lk 17:1-6)

The US Roman Catholic Bishops meet this week in Baltimore, MD, close to where I live. Today’s lectionary readings are pointed and powerful; the Spirit is speaking, and I pray the bishops listen well. Jesus tells us that sin will inevitably occur and we must be on our guard. But he also talks about forgiveness, so it’s no surprise the Apostles then ask for him to increase their faith: ‘Increase our faith, Lord, because we have no capacity to forgive over and over again like you say we’re supposed to!’ Final judgment is in the hands of God; only God knows the sincerity of the human heart. When sin is grave, atonement is called for. But real, true healing can only be achieved through forgiveness. ‘Increase our faith, Lord, so that we can be forgiving like you.’

Nov 13: *“...older men should be temperate, dignified, self-controlled... older women should be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to drink... Urge the younger men, similarly, to control themselves...”* (Ti 2: 1-8, 11-14)

Have you ever considered what a dramatic change Christianity was for the Gentile converts? Here Paul is instructing Titus to try and keep the Cretan Christians in line. Many of these new Christian communities were moving from a pagan lifestyle and environment, with multiple gods and festivals, etc., etc. We may encounter something similar now. The culture and surrounding environment in which faith is practiced can be different from community to community. Poor urban and rural faith communities deal with societal issues of which suburban communities have no idea. Regardless of where we practice, the radical demands of Christianity are tough. Let’s make sure we respect each other and the unique challenges we face in being faithful followers.

Nov 14: *“They are to slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate, exercising all graciousness toward everyone.”* (Ti 3:1-7)

Well, here’s a novel idea! How about instead of *“living in malice and envy, hateful ourselves and hating one another,”* we try Paul’s advice. Here’s my challenge for today: I will try my best to keep from uttering anything negative about: my country, the Church, the government, the world, the weather, the traffic, my family, myself. Yes, I am even going to be gracious towards myself. Are you up for the challenge too?

Nov 15: *The LORD secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free. The LORD gives sight to the blind... The LORD protects strangers. The fatherless and the widow he sustains...* (Ps 146)

Isn’t it nice that the Lord takes care of all this? The hungry get fed, the blind see, strangers are protected. Really, what is left for us to do when God does it all? *“Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion upon this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, and yours are the eyes. You are his body.”* (St. Teresa of Avila)

Nov 16: *“Within my heart I treasure your promise, that I may not sin against you.”* (Ps 119)

You think you’ve read the psalms so many times, there is nothing new to find, and then a little gem like this pops up. I love the imagery of treasuring God’s promise, and I love the lesson: if we hold his promise in a special place in our heart—not hidden away, but active and alive—that promise will be a source of strength against temptation and sin. *“Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you and you will see the things that are in heaven; for there is but one single entry to them both. The ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within your soul . . . Dive into yourself, and in your soul you will discover the stairs by which to ascend.”* (St. Isaac of Nineveh)

Nov 17: *“Beloved, you are faithful in all you do for the brothers and sisters, especially for strangers...help them in a way worthy of God to continue their journey....support such persons, so that we may be co-workers in the truth.”* (3 Jn 5-8)

John is writing to one, Gaius, likely a Gentile Christian from Asia Minor. The strangers he’s referring to are missionaries from other Christian communities. When I first read this passage (without context), I thought about the refugee “caravan” approaching the US border. The early Christian communities were leery of strangers. They could be false prophets or infiltrators sent in to unmask the new converts. We tell our kids to be wary of strangers. It’s wise to cautious until we can discern if the stranger is a co-worker in the truth. And what was the truth the early Christians held? And that we hold? That Christ will return in glory to judge the nations based on how they have treated the poor, the prisoner, the stranger. Cautionary language indeed.