

## Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

When Mark was organizing his gospel, he must have considered the story of the widow to be especially significant, for he kept it for the very last scene in Jesus' public ministry. It is followed by a reflection on the significance of history and then the account of the last supper and the passion and resurrection of Jesus. It sums up everything Jesus has said about what it means to be his disciple.

As read now in the Church's liturgy, the temple treasury is a symbol of the Christian community which is the Body of Christ on earth, and in which the Spirit of his and the Father's love dwells as in a temple. Some people have many talents and they contribute generously to the community. Others, like the widow, feel that they have very little to offer, but they give what they have all the same. We might be tempted to compare people's contribution, but we would be sure to get it wrong. Jesus draws our attention to the widow. She has very little - only two single copper coins (the smallest Roman coin: the *lepta*). She could have thought that what she had was not worth offering. She could have compared her offering to that of the people around her and been too ashamed to make her contribution. She could have given one piece and kept the other. What impressed Jesus was that, simply, without shame or false humility, she gave all she had. Jesus presents her as a model for us all.

Writing to the Christian community in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:4-7), Paul has this to say:

'There are varieties of *gifts*[charisma], but the same *Spirit*;  
there are varieties of *ministries*[diakonia], but the same *Lord*;  
there are varieties of *ways of energising*[energêma],  
but it is the same *God* who inspires them all in everyone.  
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'

The Spirit of God has given each of us special gifts, and, whatever our life experience has been, there is a special way of loving now that only we can give. This love is incredibly powerful, because love comes from God, who can create out of nothing. When we place our trust in God's creative energy within us, and when we love with all our heart in the only way we can, we are continuing the ministry of Jesus, and his heart will reach out to us with a special love as he sees us eager to carry on his mission in the world and build up the body of faith which continues to preach the good news to a world that desperately needs to hear it again in our day.

Each one of us is invited to contribute our gifts to the building of this community of love. We are not asked to give what others give. We are not asked to give what we do not have. We are not expected to offer what we used to be and used to have, or what we would have been or would have had if things had gone differently in our lives. We are not asked to give what we would like to have had to offer, or what others expect of us.

God knows us, God understands our hearts. He longs for us to come as we are, for all he wants of us is our love and the ways in which we can make this love real for others. People watching at the temple treasury that day may have thought that the widow had given nothing worthwhile. They may have even thought that they could manage quite well without her apparently paltry contribution. Jesus saw things otherwise. She put in more than all the others because she gave herself fully without holding back.

There are many ways in which we contribute to the community. The significance of our financial contribution is dramatized in the liturgy when our money, which represents time and work and personal sacrifice, is brought to the altar as part of our offering. The importance of this contribution is obvious to us all and such self-sacrifice will not go unrewarded. We listen to Jesus when he says: 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat ... I was naked and you clothed me ... welcome into the kingdom of my Father'.

Many of you have found other ways as well to make your contribution to the life of the community. The parish bulletin each week is full of the community building activities of the parish, and no doubt there are many others that go unnoticed. Some generously offer of your time and experience to help as members of the Parish Pastoral Council. Others help here in the liturgy in various ways, each one contributing according to your gifts to build and maintain our family of faith. Some of you take the body of Christ to those who cannot join us here, helping them to know that in their sickness they are precious members of our community.

Jesus in this morning's gospel encourages every one of us to give ourselves in love to the building of his body. He needs us all, and we need each other. We need the old and the young, we need the well and the sick, we need everyone's love to support us in our faith and hope as we strive to draw closer to Jesus.

Why, in our busy lives, would we consider it so important to be part of the faith community of the church? Today's responsorial psalm gives us a number of good reasons.

- In a world where so many are unfaithful, we are reminded that 'the Lord keeps faith for ever'. His love is the most significant love in our lives, so the community of faith can be the most enriching community to which we can belong. Why try to live without it? and why not do what we can to invite and welcome others into it?
- In a world where there is so much injustice we are reminded that 'He is just to those who are oppressed'. He hears our cry and through us can hear the cry of others. Why not listen to him and accept the privilege of letting him hear the cry of others through us?
- We are hungry for love and for understanding. So is everyone else. We are reminded that 'he gives bread to the hungry'. He nourishes us through his word and at the Eucharistic table. Why not answer his invitation to come to him, and why not attract others to come, as well as take him to others in whatever way we can?
- It is so easy in our world to remain locked in loneliness, in prejudice, in fear. 'The Lord', we are told, 'sets prisoners free'. We need others to mediate this liberating love to us. Why not allow Jesus to use our words and our work and our gifts in whatever way he can to touch others?

The psalm goes on to remind us that 'The Lord gives sight to the blind. He raises up those who are bowed down. He protects the stranger and supports the widow and the orphan'. His Spirit invites us to enjoy this grace and to draw others to enjoy it with us.

A story is told of some soldiers who came to a town that had been severely bombed. A church

had been hit and the statue of the sacred Heart was broken. They had to move on in a hurry, but wanted to fix up the statue before leaving. So they pasted the broken bits together, but they could not find the hands in the rubble, so they placed the statue on its pedestal and chalked a notice in front of it: 'I have no hands but yours'.

Jesus longs to do everything which we read in today's psalm. Some of it he wants to do through me and some of it he wants to do through you. We might think that we have little or nothing to give, but that is not true. We have ourselves to give, and if we offer to the community our small amount of love, our small amount of time, our small amount of patience and experience - and we offer it as best we can with all our heart. Jesus will see, even if no one else does. The widow may have thought she wasn't giving much. Jesus knew that she gave more than anyone, 'because from the little she had she has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on'.