

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

November, 2006 – Twenty Third Sunday After Pentecost

Text: Mark 12:38-44

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“God’s Little Female Christ”

She came up to the offering basket and dropped in a penny’s worth, two coins. Did anybody notice what she did? Not at all. No one *ever* noticed her.

And why? Because she was all used up. She wasn’t on the radar of the wealthy, the powerful, the clergy and their “wannabees”. All used up –nothing left for them to gain out of traipsing after her. All used up.

This story gets a grip on me. It won’t let me go. It is quite simple, quite dramatic and it evangelizes us. It is a defining moment for each one of us as we go through life and through the weekly liturgies. Sooner or later we meet up with this reading, with this widow and her mighty mite. And are we shamed, are we deeply moved or are we inspired? That’s up to you. Or is it?

Sermons do all kinds of things. They may inform us. They may provoke us to thought. They may motivate us to act. They may allow our minds to wander. Sermons do many, many things. But of all the things I want my sermons to do, is that they might communicate a meaning to your life, a meaning of life, a meaning for life. Not words, but life, abundant life.

This little picture of a poor widow dropping in those two tiny coins, this little snippet of life, so simply and powerfully, does just that –it reveals to us, if we are open to its meaning, it reveals to us the meaning of following the Christ, the meaning of that life for us.

Nobody even noticed her. She probably slipped in among the very important people. Slipped in and slipped out. But Jesus noticed her and saw in her a fellow traveler.

I do not think that this story is really about putting down the rich. They gave substantially to the ministries of the Temple in Jerusalem. They appear generous. Jesus noticed them too and not negatively. It’s just that he noticed her even more so and grants her a place of honor.

That momentary blip in the often tawdry human story of a little insignificant and basically unnoticed peasant woman, I think, was a sermon to Jesus –a breath of fresh air, like the election results were to most of us last week, a reassurance that he wasn’t alone in his single mindedness. She was so much like him. He was not alone. A refreshing gift from God, a reminder, that there was someone else who walked the same walk. A female Christ.

Jesus also noticed the clergy and was unsparing in his criticism: of their need for self-importance, of their barely disguised ambitions for using God’s people to get to “the good life,”

so defined here as devouring widow's estates. Perhaps this widow was one of their victims? We don't know. Regardless, she preaches to us.

"Everything she had, all she had to live on," that's how Jesus gave meaning to her actions. And no one else noticed. But Jesus, ever the teacher of the meaning of life, of our ragged human existence, drives that point home to his disciples, some of whom must have seen not only her actions but surely also its depth significance for life.

What does she mean for us? Her last penny was a fortune in God's eyes. She withheld nothing from God and neither did God withhold grace from her. And even though she left bereft of what you and I would consider essential to survive, she had an inner strength that tapped into the promises of God as no other –except Jesus himself.

Some people are called by God to such depths of visionary sacrifice and courage. The closest I came was when I was in college working two part-time jobs and going full-time to classes. It was hard working for 75 cents an hour (that'll date me!) and financially I fell further and further behind. My friends avoided me for fear I would ask more from them. And one morning I woke with only a nickel in my pocket with a full day of school, work and no meals ahead of me.

I missed breakfast, of course. And in the middle of the morning went to my mailbox – only to discover a letter of grace and promise. I opened it and there before my eyes was a check for \$25 and a note from a little old lady who had met me once who thought I could use a little help. Use a little help! I had bacon, eggs toast and jelly that morning! I wrote her a thank you. And I learnt from that day the true meaning of the words, "God will provide."

However God calls you through life God will provide for you. God's promises are as concrete as the earth under your feet and as wondrous as the stars above in their splendor. And God provides to you this day this little story of that little widow.

She evangelizes us. She is a Christ, a female Christ whose story is God's quiet but passionate rebuke to an unjust social system and a reminder of how we all rely on the promises of God –conscious or not. Our gospel widow never knew she was taking us this far. She never suspected that she could evangelize us, could lead us to the meaning of Christ, the meaning of the Christian life.

We are here this morning for all kinds of reasons and motives. But in the name of this little widow Christ who now sits in the heavens with Jesus, we are all here because God has brought us here. The same grace that empowered her to do her mighty thing empowers us to seek forgiveness, to give of ourselves generously of ourselves for others, to quietly, or not so quietly, rebuke the unjust social systems in which we find the poor and the oppressed.

And when we realize that this grace has brought us here and that this grace will send us forth, we have grasped again the meaning of life for us, the meaning of church. Thank you little old ladies of the faith. From you we have much to learn and much to be thankful for. Amen

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