

March 29, 2021

Read Mark 12

Key verses: Mark 12:43-44

Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

Our Last Full Measure

The twelfth chapter of Mark's gospel is chock full of lessons for us, and it ends with the story about "The Widow's Mite," the small coins that a poor woman gives to the Temple treasury. Though the gift seemed small, Jesus knew that the widow was giving all the money she had. The wealthy may have put more into the treasury, but what they gave represented only a small fraction of what they possessed.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus is tested by some Pharisees and Herodians about paying taxes, and Jesus silences his critics by telling them to "render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." While Jesus may have won the argument, we still puzzle today over what *we* should render to Caesar, what we should render to God, and what we should keep for ourselves. We all attempt to find that comfort level in how much we give to the Church, in how liberally we interpret income tax laws, and how much personal wealth we accumulate. In all of this we strive for peace of mind.

But too often an honest study of scripture unsettles us, because God speaks bluntly, saying things like, "You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lev 19:34), and "Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice" (Deut 27:19), "Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation" (Ps 68:5), and finally (from today's reading) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31).

We love love. We understand love to be God's greatest quality, and we recognize that "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). Jesus call all of us friends, and shows us his love by offering up his last full measure for humanity. It's a tough act to follow, but it's what we've been made to do. And to whatever extent we are able to do this and *not* withhold our love from others - *that* will determine our own level of peace and joy in this life.

Prayer: Lord God, we all struggle with the question of giving. We are so concerned with our own level of comfort and security that we fail to address the unnecessary suffering experienced by others. Open our hearts a little more. Help us to recognize that all we have comes from you, and help us to offer it freely to you as we offer it to others. Amen.