

***But She from Her Poverty***  
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For the past several weeks, I have focused my homilies on the failure of Jesus' disciples to understand that he must suffer and die. The disciples, who should have known better, failed to comprehend the mystery of Jesus' suffering and death. But whereas the disciples failed to understand Jesus, there are a host of seemingly insignificant people who get it right. For example the four men who lowered a paralytic through a roof for Jesus to cure understood the power of Jesus to heal and save. The woman who touched Jesus' cloak to be healed from her hemorrhages understood the power of Jesus to heal and save. Jairus, whose twelve year old daughter was at the point of death, and the father, whose son was possessed by a powerful demon, understood the power of Jesus to heal and save. But the most amazing person—the one for whom Jesus reserves the greatest praise—is the widow of today's gospel.

She goes into the temple treasury where the priests announce the offerings that people bring for the temple. Twenty five shekels, the priest cries out for all to hear, and a rich patron walks proudly away. Fifty shekels, the priest cries out for all to hear, and a rich patron walks proudly away. A hundred shekels, the priest cries out for all to hear, and a rich patron walks proudly away. Two small coins, the priest sneers for all to hear, and the widow walks away, disgraced because her gift is so small.

But Jesus knows what others do not know. He knows that this poor widow, who has no one to support her, has given the last of her resources to support God's temple. Like the widow in today's first reading who gives her last bit of food to Elijah, this poor widow gives everything she has to God. She withholds nothing. She spares nothing. She leaves nothing for herself. She gives everything to God.

This widow is the most generous person of the Gospel. She exhibits more faith than Jesus' disciples. She shows more generosity than anyone else. She is the perfect model of what it means to be a disciple. She is the supreme example of what it means to be a Christian. More than anyone else, she demonstrates the love of Christ.

The story of this widow takes place shortly before Jesus' passion. It occurs before Jesus' passion because this widow foreshadows the self-sacrificing love of Christ who pours out his life for the sake of others. Jesus and the widow are one in their dedication to God. The widow gives all that she has, the whole of her livelihood; Jesus pours out the whole of his life, withholding nothing, by his death on the cross.

This woman is a minor character in the Gospel, a person of no account. And yet she, more than anyone else, teaches us what it means to be a disciple. To be a disciple is to give ourselves wholly and entirely to God. To be a disciple is to give ourselves for the sake of the gospel. To be a disciple is to trust that if we give all, God will give us everything in return.

But how difficult it is to do this! Wouldn't it be more practical, we say, to withhold something for ourselves? Wouldn't it have been more practical for the widow to give half of her

possessions to the temple and save the other half for herself? Wouldn't it have been more practical to keep something for herself?

Practically speaking, the answer is yes. It would be more practical to be cautious and prudent. It would be more practical to withhold something for ourselves. But the life of faith is reckless. It believes and trusts in the power of God. It believes even when it seems there is no reason to hope. The life of faith is reckless because it trusts that God is faithful to his promises. It trusts that God cannot be outdone in generosity.

I know I do not have the faith of this widow. I praise and extoll her but I do not have her faith. But she exemplifies the faith I seek. She is the disciple I want to be. For, I know that if I live with her kind of faith, my ministry will thrive. I know that if I live with her kind of faith, I will be faithful to Christ and his church. And so I pray: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

In a few moments we will receive the Eucharist and enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. As we enter into the mystery, we ask for the grace to live with the generous spirit of this widow, the perfect example of faith and discipleship.