

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
November 11, 2018

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It's an old adage that trying to put a human mind straight is about as successful as straightening a dog's curly tail! The moment you let go of the tail it curls again. Certain minds are like that. They lose their straightness the moment they reject guidance. On this issue most of us are in trouble. Due to our worldly environment and its powerful influence on us we are like the dog's curly tail. When we are with Jesus we are all right. But the moment we stray from His guidance we easily make evaluations inconsistent with Christ's teaching.

This incident at the Jerusalem treasury gave Our Lord opportunity to teach about the worth of human beings in the sight of God. The shock to our perception is God does not confer value on the basis of power and wealth, any more than He does on the basis of lineage, skin color, education, or religion. The world values the rich men observed by Jesus more than it does the widow. And it will always do that. In *Fiddler on the Roof* Tevye says "When you're rich they think you really know." But the moment we forget the Lord's straightening us out on the matter we fall in with the world's mindset.

Nothing in the Gospel incident requires us to believe the widow was a particularly saintly woman. Rather, she was most likely seeking God's help in some direct and material way. Whatever her situation, it caused her to stake everything upon God. And the Lord Jesus picked up on that. It is what He pointed out to the disciples about her. "She has put in everything she had, her whole living."

Anyone who comes to this point of extremity, realizing there is no hope but in God, has become a realist. That is the verdict of God Incarnate. Unlike the rich men making their token contribution and wandering around in the delusion their wealth saves them, this widow knows the real score. And Jesus teaches us to approach God like her. This isn't a teaching about rich versus poor. It is about *attitudes* and *disposition* in our approach to Almighty God.

And again, it isn't about saintliness. Jesus never says of the widow, "See how she loves God." In fact many of the persons created in Our Lord's parables are acting simply out of *self-interest*. His message is that when we get clear about what our self-interest really is we will seek the direct and personal relationship with

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Almighty God. Nor are we called necessarily to be poor financially. The point here is that the widow was *totally* poor. Because she knew she was helpless, and ultimately dependent upon the mercy which cannot be bought or earned, she was ready to receive the unconditional Divine Love God wants to give each of His children.

Here is what is set before us. In His zeal for souls the Lord Jesus Christ has nothing better to do than to sit down opposite the Jerusalem treasury and watch the crowd put money into the poor box! Why? Because He can tell the state of our souls' health by whether we contribute liberally or sparingly, cheerfully or reluctantly. And it is obvious from today's gospel passage Jesus notices not only the amount we contribute but *the heart of the matter*: what principle guides our action, what our views are in giving, whether we do it to be seen of men or "as unto the Lord."

It is easy for us to put the incident of the widow's mite at a safe distance where it can make no claim upon us. You know the jargon: it's a "paradigm in our folklore." Leave it to St Augustine to remind us where the rubber hits the road. His advice? "Find out how much God has given you and from it take what you need: the remainder which you do not require is needed by others."

All through the Scriptures the memory is held up to us of individual souls who were generous with God and direct with Him. How about the widow of Zarephath, whose nearly empty jar of meal and cruse of oil never gave out *after* she made a loaf for Elijah. Or what Christ did for 5000 guests when a boy offered his basket lunch. Saint Paul praises the Macedonian churches whose "deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality."

Our Lord Jesus is gracious. He requires according to what we have, never according to what we don't have. The widow did not know God Incarnate was watching her. "The Lord does not see as man sees but looks on the heart." And He saw her habitual generosity when she cast in both her coins, although it was all her living. Well....Jesus wants all my living too. *And He wants yours.*