

Sunday November 7th

The Widow & The Scribes

Heavenly Father, Please help us to give to the fullest. AMEN

Let's be very clear here. Today's Gospel is about religion, and money, and how we give, and what that means. The reading happens to coincide with the end of our Stewardship Month and our drive for pledges here at Saint Andrews. We'll get back to that.

It is an age old topic. It is a much considered juxtaposition; the Church and money, wealth and poverty - the haves and the have-nots - decorum and brashness - privilege and less fortunate - piety and humility.

There are two parts to the reading. The first part is Jesus' warning to his disciples of the treachery and pomposity of the Scribes in Jerusalem. Not all Scribes are the same. The Scribes in Galilee are somewhere in the middle of the social order. The Scribes in Jerusalem though, have attained higher status and influence through association with the priestly aristocracy. Though not all Scribes would be in a position to indulge in this type of ostentatious display, those who were retainers of wealthy high priestly families around Jerusalem, would have taken on the trappings of wealth and power - wealth and power by association if you will.

The idea that the Scribes would "devour widows' houses" refers to the suggestion that some scribes would accept hospitality from widows under the pretense of piety, in order to support their tastes for wealth and power. This could include coercing the widows against their best interests. The Scribes are linked to their patrons, a posturing, wealthy aristocracy that had no concern for people. The condemnation of those who engage in such practices will be

even worse than that for others, since they use the name of God to mask what they are doing.

When he sent them out to preach, Jesus prohibited his own disciples from accumulating wealth, or moving from the first household to take them in. Jesus constantly warned his own disciples against seeking honor and favor, rather than serving others.

In the next part of the Lesson, Jesus moves to the Treasury (this might not have been a reference to the actual Treasury Building on the Temple grounds, but more likely it referred to the receptacles for collecting the Temple taxes and freewill offerings. Here Mark is underscoring the gap between a wealthy person's offering and the Widow's gift of her livelihood.

Jesus points out that the large amounts given by the wealthy were probably visible to all, and purposefully so. Jesus then points out the very humble devotion of the Widow. The widow was alone. She is elderly. She was at the very bottom of the social order of the day. She was probably without ways and means. No social security spousal support for this widow. She would survive on the crumbs (and pennies) she could gather. And she was very much at the mercy (or prey) of those who could take advantage of her.

And I think that the manner of the giving is what Jesus notices. Maybe he is counting the money – but I don't think so. I think he is noticing what is in the hearts of those around him. I think he is saying "pay attention to the unnoticeable sacrifices of those with less to give."

Sacrifice is an interesting word. I learned that its Latin roots mean "Sacred Gift" and "To Give". So, the original meaning of the word sacrifice is "to give a sacred gift." I think today it means to many to give more than we should or giving more

than we can. The word “offering” is today closer perhaps to the original meaning of sacrifice.

There are probably millions of examples of sacrifice that I could point to in modern day that carry the power of these important contributions. (Refer to any of our Armed Forces, Mother Theresa, Sister Mary Lanning and so on). I think that Jesus is noticing the way in which an offering is made, perhaps more than the nature of the offering.

My father was many things in his life. One of the most important things he did in addition to Teaching, and later becoming a Probate Judge, was his work as a coach. His lot was a couple of Junior Varsity teams – one of Football and one of Hockey. This is trickier than it might seem. Junior Varsity is not the big leagues after all. It is the minor leagues of High School Sports. Those walking this road are either at the limit of their capabilities or they are passing through on the way to greater accomplishments. Either way it is a bit of a holding tank.

As a Junior Varsity coach you have to pick your spots. Some of Dad’s players went on to relatively great things. One of his players in particular, ended up being very good – good enough to make it to the real major leagues. This former player was kind enough to tell me a story about my father as a coach.

This guy was a hockey goalie – a very challenging position. He showed a lot of talent and was getting better and better. He had not grown up with the sport, so was learning as he went. He explained that he ended up in goal because he wasn’t such a good skater – ironic because you have to be good to make the goalie thing work. The thing is that goalies need special skates (goalie skates) to play well. This player could not afford the goalie skates and was suffering with regular hockey skates – which makes a

challenging position very much more so – and significantly more painful due to the lack of padding.

One day this player arrived at practice to put on his gear. There was a new pair of Goalie Skates waiting for him – right size and all. Nothing was said. He simply told me that to this day is sure that Coach Downes put those skates there for him. I was struck by the story but not surprised. My father did many things – especially not seeking notice or credit. He performed acts of kindness without getting caught. Two coins - two skates.

The man I refer to has gone on to do great things in his life – I know he has returned the kindness many times over. He has been a great help to many students along the way. He also played the highest level of Ice Hockey.

There are many forms of poverty. We all have heard of some magnificent families with great wealth who have had more than their share of tragedy. Tragic indeed is the family that is just unable to share and enjoy their wealth. Nothing is more uplifting though than someone who just loves life as it is “because we didn’t know we were poor.” (I think that is a Dolly Parton quote).

Today’s reading is about finding the Spiritual Wealth (the Widow’s wealth) in giving. It is about avoiding the Spiritual Poverty that wealth sometimes invites. The gaps in Spiritual Wealth are contrasted in the story of the Widow and the Scribes. Let us pray for the Spiritual Wealth of our Saint Andrews Family.

So getting back to that part of this that is of our Church and money. I was asked last week to say a few words about our Stewardship of this great Church at Bridge & Main. Fresh off our Visioning team effort recently, we spent a good number

of hours looking at Saint Andrew's history. And we spent a good amount of hours "Visioning" what we can do now to ensure that Saint Andrews is here for those yet to come.

It is impossible to look at any part of Saint Andrews without noticing the Wealth of Spirit here in the constant whir of volunteerism here - Not just here and now. Clearly, Saint Andrews is a tribute to the centuries of service and volunteerism that have also gone before us. Volunteerism is evident - at our door, at the aisle, at the altar, in the Choir and on and on (and frankly this does feel a bit like preaching to the Choir). I think you get the idea of how much Saint Andrews means to me and my family.

Another part of volunteerism here is the work that is done managing our Saint Andrews Family finances. What my pledge especially means is that these very dedicated volunteers that trudge the happy road of our fiscal wellbeing, is that they can plan according to the pledges received. The most important thing about our pledges is not the amount. The important thing is to let them know our intention.

God, Help us to find Spiritual Wealth! AMEN