

32 Sunday B

November 11, 2018

St. Patrick's

The widow in the Gospel: she could have put into the collection box only one of her coins, and kept the other. Instead, uncurling her fingers from around two copper coins and letting them fall into the temple treasury, she gave—as the Gospel sharply says it—“**all that she had to live on.**”

My question, then: What happened to this widow *after* she left the collection box?

The Gospel, in fact, simply tells us that she took a risk; it does not tell us what happened to her *after* she left the collection box. Now there are at least three possibilities—

- Once the widow left the treasury, someone caring could have noticed her destitution and come to her aid. Oh, like the prophet Elijah who took bounteous care of that destitute widow of Zarephath after she shared all with the prophet of God. Yes, someone could have helped the widow in today's Gospel. It would be a smiley-face ending, indeed!
- Another scenario: she could have found simple work that could provide her with a meager security, scratching out life each day.
- There does remain a harsh possibility which can accompany such a risk: the widow could have struggled in vain, find no help, and die in destitution. Her last words, with no one to hear them, then might be whispered: “**My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**”

The rich, the scribes: *they* were the people to watch, only Jesus was not watching them in the temple that day. He was not paying attention to what was happening on center stage because he was far more interested in what was going on the edge of the stage, and in one woman in particular. It's hard to know how the widow caught Jesus' attention. She did not catch anyone else's, that is for sure.

Let's be clear: nowhere in this passage does Jesus praise the widow for what she is doing. He simply calls the disciples over and points out, “**She's the one to watch.**” Notice her. Jesus here doesn't dismiss the gifts of the rich. He simply points out that the major characters are the minor givers, while the minor character—this destitute widow—turns out to be the major donor of them all.

That, St. Patrick's, is why Jesus noticed the poor widow in the first place. St. Mark's Gospel places *this* powerful scene at the very end of Jesus' ministry. After observing this nameless woman, he leaves the temple with his disciples for the final time. It was his final visit to the temple. In four days, according to St. Mark's Gospel, he will be hanging lifeless from a cross, having uncurled his fingers from around his own risky offering, to give up the two copper coins of his life. And from the wood of the tree, as St. Mark's Gospel tells us, Jesus screams:

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

That's why Jesus noticed her in the first place. She reminded him of someone. If it was the end for her; it would soon be the end for him, too. She withheld nothing from God; neither did he. It took one to know one. The widow's bold risk points to Jesus' bold risk: her sacrifice of **“all she had to live on”** points to the Lord's sacrifice of his very self. And, this side of eternity, this side of the tomb, Jesus' risk *did* end in failure. He was rejected and crucified.

Friends: both the nameless widow and Jesus show us their total trust in and dependence on the Father in heaven. Sometimes, only in the resurrection does such a trust and such a risk make any sense.

Yes, after this encounter in the temple, Jesus leaves the temple for the last time. As we come toward the end of the church's year, Jesus turns around and counsels us, **“She's the one to watch.”**

With all the chaos within the church—here in West Tennessee and in the church universal...with all the divisions and angry rhetoric in our nation...and with all the challenges each of us faces daily in our own callings and life...well, we have a destitute widow and a rejected Savior—but they gave their God **“all they had to live on.”**

It's November, and we especially remember our beloved who have died, and many of them showed us how to live and how to die. A nameless widow and a crucified Jesus. Sometimes, only in the resurrection does such a trust and such a risk make any sense.

General Intercessions

November 11, 2018

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Grant us the generous spirit of the Gospel widow's sacrifice, that we might truly follow Jesus in his sacrifice for us; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bless us, the Church of West Tennessee, with healing; bring us a new bishop who might have, in the words of Pope Francis, “the smell of the sheep”; we pray to you, O Lord—

Form our newly-elected government leaders to strive for “liberty and justice for all,” while always showing reverence for human life; we pray to you, O Lord—

On this one hundredth anniversary of the end of World War I, shape us according to the first Armistice Day to be “dedicated for the cause of world peace”; we pray to you, O Lord—

Strengthen all veterans, especially those who suffer from physical or mental wounds; we pray to you, O Lord—

Make us all mindful of the ongoing struggles of people and nations affected by natural disasters, especially from the wildfires in California; we pray to you, O Lord—

Welcome into the light of your face all who have died in the service of our country, and all those named in our Book of Remembrance; we pray to you, O Lord—