



## GENEROUS OR EXPLOITED?

(MARK 12:38-44)

*"The Widow's Mite" by Gustave Dore c. 1880*

Mark presents us with portraits of two different kinds of people in our Gospel passage today and may well be hinting at the dangers inherent in institutional or organised religion.

The scene is the Temple in Jerusalem, the context a consideration about the legal and theological authorities known as the scribes. We have seen Jesus interacting positively with a member of this group, but now he takes a more negative view of some of the other scribes, who indulge in self-promoting behaviour. As well as attracting attention by their rather flamboyant dress and seeking places of honour in the synagogue and at banquets, they appear to abuse their position as lawyers in charge of the estate of widows: such women were traditionally regarded as being in need of special protection, given their vulnerable situation in the society of the day. These men are accused of exploiting their position of trust for monetary gain, which would be condemned by the prophets of Israel.

The mention of widows suggests that the second section should be considered along with the first. This is the episode often referred to as "the widow's mite", the portrait of the woman who had little, but gave it all for the upkeep of the Temple, the House of God. The usual interpretation is that Jesus commends her action as an outstanding example of generosity; but could it be that he is deploring a situation whereby she feels compelled to put the apparent requirements of the Temple (and its staff) in front of her own very pressing needs? ■

### LEARN

Scribes were interpreters of the Law and could act for others in legal matters.

Widows, orphans and poor people were especially vulnerable members of society in biblical times.

The collection boxes in the Temple were shaped like trumpets and the sound made by coins thrown in revealed the metal – and therefore the value – of the person's offering.

### DO

Ask yourself whether Jesus is commending or deploring the widow's action. Discuss with others whether you think Mass offerings and stole fees are appropriate today and what might be a better alternative.



### SAY

**"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."**

(Reinhold Niebuhr)

### REFLECT

One problem with the written word is that we cannot know for certain the tone of voice in which a character is speaking. It may be obvious from the context, but in cases such as our Gospel reading today, it may well not be so clear, and it can make all the difference. A great danger with organised religion is that it requires money to function. Church buildings need to be maintained, clergy need to be supported; but reform movements throughout the history of the

Church indicate that keeping the proper balance in such matters can be difficult.

An area in church life which causes a certain amount of unease today is that of Mass stipends and stole fees. Such payments are officially voluntary offerings. The law of the Church is very clear that any appearance of simony is to be avoided (simony being the intent to deal commercially in sacred things). This is a delicate area, and one which perhaps

needs to be considered by the community as a whole. Is it a good thing that a priest should be more or less dependent on offerings for sacramental services? How does this practice affect those involved? If Jesus is criticising the practice of his day, the fact that it occurs in the Gospel should make us ask how it applies to us now. That the question is difficult means that we should be asking it. ■



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Let my prayer come into your presence.  
Incline your ear to my cry for help, O Lord.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

Almighty and merciful God,  
graciously keep from us all adversity,  
so that, unhindered in mind and body alike,  
we may pursue in freedom of heart  
the things that are yours.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** 1 Kings 17:10-16

A reading from the first book of the Kings.  
Elijah the Prophet went off to Sidon. And when he reached the city gate, there was a widow gathering sticks; addressing her he said, "Please bring a little water in a vessel for me to drink." She was setting off to bring it when he called after her. "Please" he said, "bring me a scrap of bread in your hand." "As the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I have no baked bread, but only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug; I am just gathering a stick or two to go and prepare this for myself and my son to eat, and then we shall die." But Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid, go and do as you have said; but first make a little scone of it for me and bring it to me, and then make some for yourself and for your son. For thus the Lord speaks, the God of Israel:

'Jar of meal shall not be spent,  
jug of oil shall not be emptied,  
before the day when the Lord sends  
rain on the face of the earth.'

The woman went and did as Elijah told her and they ate the food, she, himself and her son. The jar of meal was not spent nor the jug of oil emptied, just as the Lord had foretold through Elijah.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 145

Response:

My soul, give praise to the Lord.

or

Alleluia!

1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever,  
who is just to those who are oppressed.  
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,  
the Lord, who sets prisoners free. (R.)
2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind,  
who raises up those who are bowed  
down.  
It is the Lord who loves the just,  
the Lord who protects the stranger. (R.)
3. The Lord upholds the widow and orphan  
but thwarts the path of the wicked.  
The Lord will reign for ever,  
Zion's God, from age to age. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Hebrews 9:24-28

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

It is not as though Christ had entered a man-made sanctuary which was only modelled on the real one; but it was heaven itself, so that he could appear in the actual presence of God on our behalf. And he does not have to offer himself again and again, like the high priest going into the sanctuary year after year with the blood that is not his own, or else he would have had to suffer over and over again since the world began. Instead of that, he has made his appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself. Since men only die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself, and when he appears a second time, it will not be to deal with sin but to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

Even if you have to die, says the Lord,  
keep faithful, and I will give you  
the crown of life.

Alleluia!

**GOSPEL** Mark 12:38-44

(For shorter form, read between &gt; &lt;)

> A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. <

In his teaching Jesus said, "Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets; these are the men who swallow the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive."

> He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "I tell you solemnly, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they

had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on."

The Gospel of the Lord. &lt;

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,

*(all bow during the next three lines)*

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

Look with favour, we pray, O Lord,  
upon the sacrificial gifts offered here,  
that, celebrating in mystery the Passion of  
your Son,  
we may honour it with loving devotion.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I  
shall want.

Fresh and green are the pastures where he  
gives me repose,  
near restful waters he leads me.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Nourished by this sacred gift, O Lord,  
we give you thanks and beseech your mercy,  
that, by the pouring forth of your Spirit,  
the grace of integrity may endure  
in those your heavenly power has entered.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

