

In this Gospel narrative, Jesus shows his disciples an example of true piety, exemplified in a poor widow. We're told that he sat down in a place where he could view treasury, which is believed to refer to thirteen trumpet-shaped donation chests that stood in the temple precincts, each labeled for its different purpose.

He watched people donate money, all of which would have been metal coinage. The large sums donated by the rich would have clanked handsomely as they were thrown into the chests. Undoubtedly, some people would have been mindful of all that. One such donor was a poor widow. Widows had no inheritance rights in ancient Israel, and usually had to rely on their children, male relatives, or charity for survival.¹

Jesus observed how the widow donated to the house of God two small coins (lepta), the smallest Jewish coins in circulation, each worth one four-hundredth of a shekel. That she gave two coins suggests that she justifiably could have kept one for herself but did not. She gave it all away. Jesus said, "This poor widow put in more than all the other contributors". His disciples must have been perplexed: Had not the wealthy contributed far more toward the adornment and maintenance of the temple? Was not this woman's donation pretty much worthless?²

Jesus wants us to understand that God measures the gifts given him on a basis totally different from human calculations. He looks at the inner motives of the heart (see 1 Sam 16:7; Luke 16:15). This destitute woman had given God what she could not afford, all she had, her whole livelihood. The others had contributed from their surplus, but this woman contributed from her poverty, her substance.³

I want to say a word or two, just to give you a sense of where we are in our parish finances, but I also want to remind us why we give to the church. Most of you know that I'm a convert to Catholicism. Growing up I had rather limited direct experience with organized religion, but I was like a lot of people, in that I was skeptical of religious structures, questioning whether they functioned with integrity. I was like a lot of people who saw bad examples of pastors who plead to the faithful for money and yet seemed to live lavishly.

At some point I found my way here to the Catholic Church and had no strong opinion about financial giving. But occasionally I would hear people stand up and give a witness talk and describe how giving to the church changed their lives. I'll admit, even if I didn't think they were necessarily lying, I didn't get it.

But as I became more connected to people in the church, including those who we're deeply and joyfully engaged, I began to reconsider my inherent skepticism.

As you likely know, the Catholic Church doesn't prescribe how much you should give. It doesn't uphold a rigid tithing—that is, a tenth—of your income. The Church asks you to pray about it, and in praying to be responsible, but also generous and trusting. But how much to give is not a one-time decision. For most of us, our lives are constantly changing. Not just finance-wise—our expenses, our income—but also as we grow in faith. We must prayerfully put this question before us from time to time, reevaluating and asking, am I being personally responsible to what's entrusted to me, but am I also being generous and trusting.

As you likely know, our parishes do not receive money from the government. Our only source of income is from the giving of the faithful, and I thank you for what you give, financially or otherwise. Your giving pays for our lights, our maintenance, our few employees and our communal response as Christian people toward the poor.

Our fiscal year begins each July 1st. We are a little more than four months into this fiscal year and are down 7% from last year. On some level, that is not so much of a surprise, given a change in pasture and suddenly becoming partnered with another parish. I ask you to prayerfully consider what you are giving currently. Please make sure it's responsible, but please also be generous and trusting.

¹Healy, Mary. Gospel of Mark, The (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture). Baker Book Group - A. Kindle Edition.

²Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Jesus implicitly equates the poor widow's gift to the house of God with a gift to God himself. The story about the poor widow's giving all she had parallel's the self-emptying generosity of God himself, who did not hold back from us even his beloved Son (12:6). Of that precious and generous gift, you and I are direct beneficiaries.