

### **32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time, B**

There is a well – known proverb which says, “It is not the gift, but the thought that counts.” And the truth of that saying is easy to document and hard to dispute. Take a look at your own experience. I dare say that most cherished gifts we have received have not necessarily been the most expensive.

One man told a typical story about an old pocket watch which he kept in a glass case on his desk. The watch had no practical usefulness. It had long since stopped keeping time. And it had almost no monetary value. But the man indicated that it wasn’t for sale at any price. Neither would he trade it for the finest watch on the market. You see, that old watch had been given to him by his father who had died some years before. For him it was priceless because it symbolized a love relationship that he valued very highly.

This same principle applies when we move into the realm of Christian stewardship. The spirit with which we give to Christ and his Church is not less important than the spirit with which we give to each other. If you and I are more concerned with the motivation that causes one to give than with the market value of the gift, we can suppose that our Lord must surely feel the same. So even in the Church or perhaps we should say, especially in the Church, it is not so much the gift as the thought behind it that counts.

But having recognized that truth, we should go on to see something else, namely, that this principle like any other can be distorted and misappropriated to serve unworthy ends. For example, there are those who would use it as a smoke screen for their selfishness, an excuse to justify their miserly attitude toward money. The idea goes something like this: since the most important thing is the thought behind the gift, and not the gift itself, then it really doesn’t matter how much I give. I can give a dollar or maybe even a dime; but so long I do in the right spirit then God must surely be pleased with my stewardship.

Well, that, my brothers and sisters, is not necessarily so. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that God is unaware of or indifferent to the amount of our giving. In fact, our Gospel reading for today would certainly seem to teach otherwise. As you recall, it tells the story of one of our Lord's many visits to the temple of Jerusalem. On this occasion, he deliberately took a seat in full view of the collection box and watched the people as they dropped in their money. When the service was ended, he pointed out one woman and said to his disciples, "This poor widow contributed more than all the others."

Now, that statement has to mean that Jesus took note of how much each contributor gave. Not only did he observe the attitude of their hearts, but he also measured the amount of their gifts. How else could he have known which among them had given the most?

I heard once of a pastor who made it a point never to know how much any of his parishioners contributed to the church. He explained that this was because he did not want to be influenced, even subconsciously, by the giving habits of the people. He wanted to treat them all alike – the large contributor, the small contributor, and the non – contributor; so as a safe – guard he never looked at the financial records and never knew what anyone give.

That, of course, is a commendable purpose; but obviously, Jesus felt no such reluctance. He deliberately sat and watched how much each person gave. All the while, in his mind, he was conducting an unannounced competition; and when it was over he declared a winner: "This poor widow contributed more than all the others."

I take this to mean that our Lord measures our giving as well. If he watched how the Jews gave in the temple, surely he watches how his disciples give in the Church. He is here every Sunday, sitting in clear view of the collection box,

observing the giving habits of his people. He knows who give the most, and he knows who give the least. He measures our giving.

But as we might expect, he doesn't go about this in the usual fashion. If we set out to determine who among us had given the most, it would be a simple matter of arithmetic, just count the money. The person who gave the largest sum would logically be listed as the largest contributor.

But obviously Jesus did not figure it that way. If he had, the woman in our story would have finished dead last. Her two small copper coins did not even compare with the sizeable gifts of the wealthy, and yet Jesus clearly stated that she gave more than all the others.

To you and me, that seems like a strange kind of bookkeeping, but by his standards it was the most logical thing in the world. He explained it in the last verse of the reading. Here is what he said: "they gave from their surplus wealth, but she gave from her want all that she had to live on."

In other words, Christ measures our gifts, not according to size but according to sacrifice; and that puts things in a totally different light. To most of us, sacrifice is a familiar word but a very unfamiliar experience. We know little or nothing about it. I wonder how many of us have ever done without anything in order to give to Christ and his Church.

I am not asking you to answer that question for me; and there is no need to answer it for God, because he already knows. But you really should answer it honestly for yourself. Your giving is primarily an expression of your commitment to Christ and your concern for his cause. So the important thing is what it says to him.

When you or I give a gift to another person, we are always careful to remove the price tag, so the one receiving it will not know how much or how little it cost. But when we bring our gifts to God, we cannot do that. There is no way to conceal

the cost from him. He measures them, everyone. And it could be that someone here today, who gave the least in terms of dollars and cents, gave the most in terms of love.

How much do our giving weight in God's scale of sacrifice? That is the question each of us ought to answer for himself. **Amen.**