

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
Year B: 1 Kgs 17:10-16; Ps 146; Heb 9:24-28; Mk 12:38-44  
November 7, 2021  
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In the Gospel for this Sunday's Mass, Jesus points out two kinds of people for our attention and consideration. First, He warns us not to be like the scribes, who do things just to be seen. They *"like[d] to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets."* They presented and paraded themselves as religious men, but they did not fool God, who knew that their intentions were prideful and arrogant. Jesus said, *"They will receive a very severe condemnation."*

But then Jesus pointed out a poor widow who put two small coins in the temple treasury. The coins, next to nothing in value, were her donation to support the worship of God in the Temple. And Jesus told His disciples to pay attention to her, because she gave more to God than any of the rich people who made much larger donations. Jesus was teaching the world that God uses a different standard and calculation when He measures the gifts that are given to Him. God looks at our intentions and the motives of the heart – just as He saw the arrogant and prideful intentions of the scribes. God looks to see what our intentions are, and whether we put ourselves before others, and whether we put God before ourselves.

The reason that Jesus complimented the poor widow, He explained, is because she gave from her poverty and her need, whereas the wealthy safeguarded their comfort gave only from their surplus. This is one of those passages of the Gospel that makes some people ask, "Did Jesus really mean it? Did He really mean that we should give from our need, and not just from our surplus?" The Church has always understood that He really meant it.

When we give from our surplus, from what we don't really need, we first take care of ourselves, and then we think of God and others. But the poor widow did the opposite – she first gave to God, and then she worried about herself. She was poor and desperately needed the two small coins – they were all that she had, the Gospel tells us. But she gave them away to God and then worried about herself. Some people might think what she did was reckless and irresponsible, giving away what she needed and not taking care of herself. But Jesus compliments the widow and points her out for our imitation, because she put God and others before herself, and relied on divine providence.

By our way of thinking, what the widow did was radical. She took a great risk by giving away all that she had and putting her trust in God. But Jesus made

clear that what she did was praiseworthy and commendable and heroic, and much more pleasing to God. As one Scripture commentary says, “Jesus’ comments on the destitute widow are an example of the divine logic that overturns human ways of thinking” (Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark*, 254). God sees things differently than we do. He looks to see if we act to protect and take care of ourselves, or if we risk our own comfort for the sake of helping others. And Christ saw that what the widow was doing when she put all that she had in the treasury was like what He would do, when He gave up His life on the Cross, for our salvation. When Christ approached His Passion, He did not calculate and safeguard His own safety and comfort, but thought instead of our desperate need to be saved from our sins.

This spiritual lesson from this Gospel is a good explanation of the Church’s teaching on natural family planning and artificial contraception. The Church teaches that if a married couple needs to avoid having another child for some serious reason, the right and moral way is to abstain from the marital act when necessary to avoid conception. This is what we call “natural family planning,” because it respects the cycles of nature and uses sacrifice and virtue to avoid conception, rather than artificial means. It also respects the divine purpose of marriage, by not blocking and preventing the possibility of new life, and it’s a form of chastity within marriage that respects God’s plan for creation and marital love.

To many, this teaching of the Church is considered outdated, risky and radical, and maybe even irresponsible, because it relies at least in part, on God’s providence to determine whether a new life will be created and brought into the world. This moral teaching, no doubt, requires self-control, self-denial and sacrifice, all of which, requires virtue and discipline and spiritual maturity. But those who live this moral teaching of the Church discover that the sky does not fall, as some would fear. They are like the poor widow who sacrificed her own comfort and security in order to be faithful to God. When a married couple respects the divine plan for marital love, they put God and others before themselves. And when they are generous in letting new life flow from their marriage, they give from their need – starting with their *need for sleep* – and not from their surplus, as Christ challenges us to do. They also discover one of the great spiritual truths given to us in Sacred Scripture: “[W]hoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2Cor 9:6).

So, the goal for all of us is to give from our need, and not just from our surplus, so that we can imitate the generosity of Christ, whose sacrifice saved the world.