

HOMILY 32nd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
SEEKING ADULATION vs GENEROSITY OF HEART!
Mk 12.38-44 1Kings 17.10-14 Heb 9.24-28

And now, finally it's welcome back in person to the 32nd weekend of Ordinary Time, still observing the prescribed requirements of vaccination and masks where prescribed, including in church! Let's remember too that there continue to be well over 1,000 new COVID cases and 10 or so deaths per day, the vast majority being those not yet vaccinated. Let's remember too that it's thanks to those who have stepped forward to be vaccinated that we have reached the 80%, which has enabled us to re-open with care. Hopefully, that figure will exceed 90% by the end of the month in Victoria, and ultimately, in the whole of Australia.

In this month of All Souls, our Memorial Book is up front to acknowledge those who have died in the last year and those we have registered to be remembered; it will be on display in the church for this month of November.

Weekday Masses have resumed from Wednesday 3rd November, with Tuesday morning Mass for up to 30 unvaccinated. I'll continue to record weekend Mass on-line for those who can't be here in person or who are still anxious about present circumstances.

Well, what to make of today's Gospel, as we approach the end of the Church's year of Mark's Gospel? Last week we had the core teaching of Jesus highlighted, concerning the fundamental law of love of God and neighbour, and self, I add. Common sense and understanding of human psychology tell us that we need to have positive ego-strength and self-knowledge to be effective in ministering to others and being faithful disciples of Jesus.

We have taken a few leaps in terms of sequence as the year runs out, going from blind Bartimaeus encountering Jesus for sight and insight, to the law of love with the friendly scribe, but in between Jesus cleansing the Temple, with the religious authorities predictably challenging Jesus as to who he thinks he is, to justify his acting in such a way. Then there is the question of taxes being paid to Caesar, or the Romans, and the primacy of God and hope for resurrection, which the *sad sack* Sadducees, in particular, reject.

The main objective of the religious authorities, resentful, threatened and malicious, seems to be to 'trap' Jesus into being seen to contravene the current religious and civil law. At the same time, Jesus sees the need to connect with and relate to the real world around him, and so the civil society as well as the faith community, which he is clearly expanding through his itinerant mission and ministry. Now we see him in the final stages, having entered Jerusalem, to seal his fate, but continuing to preach and teach fearlessly, all the way.

It has been said that today's passage, contrasting the ostentatious, selfish, show-off, but hypocritical scribes, with the poor widow, who, it could be said, unwisely, gives her all. Unlike last week's friendly fellow, the atypical scribe, who affirms and accepts Jesus' teaching about the law of love. Many of these scribes appear antagonistic to Jesus, resenting that he sees straight through their external but empty religiosity and superior attitudes.

It is suggested that their dressup gear is more than just the humble prayer shawl, but rather more showy, perhaps comparable to Melbourne Cup Day fashions this last week, where attention is drawn to those in the flashy outfits, superficial that it all is! The word for their robes is *stolai*, connected to the stole I now wear to signify priestly ministry (show and tell). I confess I do have a few bright features and symbols attached to my various stoles, but all to connect faith with the world we are part of, and for which we are responsible!

The widows of those times had no social security support, and were dependent on male relatives, sometimes subject to the scribes, effectively local lawyers, acting as trustees, and so dependent on their honesty and support. Payment was often enough made through acquisition of some of their savings or husband's estate. The woman was often perceived as more a possession than an individual with rights, as with children. And so, we see the counter-cultural Jesus reaching out to such people all through his public ministry, as related by the Gospels.

So here we have her paying her dues to the Temple, as part of her religious duty. It is said that the coins she donates were the lowest denomination in circulation at that time, so really not so very much (*as we might think of 5 cent pieces, or back to halfpennies when I was at primary school in the late 1950's and early 1960's, then moving to 1 cent and 2 cent pieces, which were worth something back then, at least a handful of lollies, but not good for the teeth!*). At the same time, even the tithe or 10% paid by those who were wealthy, meant they still had their 90% left to indulge themselves, and so no great loss to them!

The main lesson of Jesus is that external show and insincerity and hardness of heart, and so, ultimately, hypocrisy, are disqualifying qualities for entering the Kingdom of justice, love and peace, which he proclaims. It is the humble widow who shows her ‘mite’ in her generosity and sincerity of faith. One might hope she had someone to look after her needs at home, but the point is that she was doing her best with the little she had. It’s the contrast that teaches us the importance of living out the law of love in practice, demonstrating ‘genuine religious behaviour’, as Raymond Brown puts it.

As Frank Moloney SDB says: “*The widow's story is not about 2 small coins. It is a challenge to all of us who regard ourselves as religious people and disciples. Too many Christians parade their religiosity but show no signs of self-giving love to those who need it most, and too many so-called disciples are afraid to give everything they have. The Gospel readings of the scribe and the widow are not (just) stories from the past; they are an urgent proclamation for those of us who wish to take our Christian discipleship seriously.*” The widow symbolizes poverty, marginalization, vulnerability and powerlessness, but still gives what little she has. Once again, the challenge is for you and me to do our little bit too, with generosity of spirit, to help alleviate the needs of others in our local and broader world.

And Brendan Byrne SJ concludes: “***We can admire (and I add, perhaps imitate in some ways) the widow's generosity and faith, while remaining critical of the religious system that drove her to such extremes.***”

john hannon

7th November 2021