**Privilege Vs Sacrifice** Mk 12:38-44 Nov 10, 2024

* Today’s gospel reading began with these words: ***“Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes & be greeted in the marketplaces, & have the most important seats in the synagogues & the places of honour at banquets***.”(Mk 12:38-39)
* It then spoke about a poor widow whose offering represented only a fraction of a penny, but in her offering, Jesus said that she, “***Gave out of her poverty, put in everything-all she had to live on.***” (Mk 12:44)
* What a contrast!
* From the very privileged who Jesus said would be punished most severely, to the poor widow who Jesus praised for her sacrificial offering.
* Like to look at both these contrasts and how they might speak to us today.
* First, I must say that I am reminded very clearly of this gospel passage whenever I would attend major church functions where there was a lot of pomp and

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Ceremony. (robes)

* One sees many long & flowing robes, & hoods, & chausibles, & mitres.
* I believe it would be this very passage that would be referred to by many protestant churches who do not believe in wearing robes.
* I must say that I can appreciate their reasoning, as to them, robes are a visible sign of a separation between clergy and laity, and they would consider this as a detraction from receiving from the Word.
* However, I also believe clergy wearing robes is a good thing, when we look at what they are actually meant to symbolize.
* Why do we (I) wear a robe?
* First of all because we are a sacramental church. Meaning of sacrament – “*An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace*.”
* AS a sacramental church we believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

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* Christianity is a religion that is full of symbols, and symbols can sometimes speak louder than words.
* Robes themselves are meant to be a sign, or a symbol, of reverence & humility
* Putting on a white robe represents that we are robed in Christ’s holiness, not our own.
* It is an acknowledgment that we are sinful, but are offering ourselves to Christ for His service.
* It is about inviting Christ to use us – to work through us. It’s submitting ourselves to Jesus & His will.
* But like many things in this world, sometimes our vanity & pride get in the way and we sometimes forget the intended intent and begin to look for status & greatness.
* That is exactly what Jesus was criticizing about the Teachers of the Law who were only interested in their own status & greatness rather than serving God.

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* It’s not a pleasant warning that Jesus gives: “***Such men will be punished most severely.”***
* The Scribes, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were the religious leaders of the day who were entrusted with the responsibility of guiding people into a right relationship with God.
* They were entrusted with an awesome responsibility
* Jesus was in a constant confrontation with them because He saw how they were misusing that trust and were caught up in power, control, and their pride.
* Their primary interest was in their own status & self centeredness.
* It is still the same awesome responsibility today for any religious leaders.
* Whenever I stand in this pulpit, I know that I am entrusted with the Word of God and I am reminded from Scripture of that trust and responsibility.
* In James 3:1 we read these words: “***Not***

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***many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.***”

* So there may be times that you do not like what I say, but as I’ve highlighted many times, my ultimate authority is the Word of God, and we never have to make excuses for the Word of God.
* The Word of God speaks for itself.
* Jesus contrasts the self-centered attitudes of these religious leaders with that of the widow whose offering represented self-sacrifice.
* While not planning this as a stewardship sermon, I realize that every sermon needs to highlight our need for gratitude to God because it is about acknowledging that absolutely everything we have is really a gift from God and therefore what we give back to God should be out of our poverty and not out of our excess.
* Recall a speaker at a Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast some years ago in Moncton

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who spoke and titled his talk, Grace – Gratitude – Generoisity.

* **Speaking about Gratitude** he said that basically we are arrogant in thinking that our wealth or possessions are our own.
* Referring to our wealth as that which is in excess of our basic needs for living,

he said there are only 3 ways that we

receive this wealth

1. Given to us
2. Acquired it through unjust & exorbitant means such as businesses inflating their profits
3. Inherited it from our relatives who had **acquired it through unjust & exorbitant** means.

* Therefore he said, we need to be doing one of only two things.
* Either be on our knees in confession or we need to be standing with arms raised to God giving thanks & gratitude for what we have.
* In contrast to the widow in today’s gospel, the way most people decide how

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much they are going to give to God is to first look at everything they have to pay (mortage, car, gas, entertainment, etc.) and then what they decide to give to God is out of what is left over.

* That is giving out of our excess, or our wealth.
* Giving out of our poverty is giving to God first.
* It is being willing to make a sacrifice.
* Take note that we read where Jesus sat down directly opposite the place where the offerings were put.
* He was actually watching how much money the people were putting in.
* Why would Jesus do that? – because He was interested where the people were at spiritually.
* He wasn’t the least bit interested in the money, or the amount. He was interested in the person.
* We read where Jesus saw many rich people put in large amounts of money.
* But they were rich and were giving out of their excess.

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* But when He saw the widow put in the two small coins that were worth less than a penny, He knew she was giving out of her poverty because it was all she had to live on that day.
* For her to do this meant that she probably would not be able to eat that day.
* What she gave was a sacrifice – what the wealthy gave was just surplus to them – it did not cost them sacrificially.
* Today, when someone gives out of their wealth or their excess, they will probably be getting a good tax receipt.
* Nothing wrong with that, but it is probably not sacrificial giving.
* But when someone gives sacrificially, out of their poverty, I can assure you that that person is in a very good place spiritually and is walking in a close relationship with the Lord.
* When we give sacrificially, it means simply that we are putting God first in our lives.
* When we put God first, we are then able

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to give with a thankful & cheerful heart because we realize all that God provides for us and how very much we have to be thankful for.

* When we put God first, he always blesses us - just ask anyone who gives sacrificially.
* When we give sacrificially, it is not about ourselves – it is not about our self-centeredness – it’s about giving off ourselves.
* Sacrifice is also an important theme today as we remember those who made great sacrifices, many even with their lives so that we can enjoy the freedom that we have in our country.
* These men & women knew the meaning of sacrifice, and we give thanks to God for them.
* The widow in the gospel account was more than willing to sacrifice because she knew that all she had – had come from God in the 1st place.
* There is a true story about a woman from Papua New Guinea.

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* This woman had walked to church which meant walking about 20 miles through some very unforgiving land.
* It was the kind of a walk that takes much more than a day – one way.
* This woman had come to faith in Christ through someone who had gone to her village, and then was told about a worship service in another village. She walked the distance to it.
* When, in the worship service, the offering plate was passed around she looked at this thing going from person to person. She had never seen this before, so she asked the person next to her what it was.
* They answered: “***We are offering to God from what we have received***.”
* Thinking about this, she knew she had no money, so when the plate came to her, she placed it on the ground – put her feet in it and stood up.
* She said that she knew that all she had, had come from God, so she gave all of herself.

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* That is what the widow did.
* She believed that all she had, had come from God and she wanted to respond with everything she had.
* She trusted God for her future and present needs.
* How we use our wealth determines where our hearts are
* We can spend our lives attempting to impress those around us with status and flowing robes, or we can simply offer ourselves to God.
* What is Jesus’ response when we choose to give sacrificially?
* Jesus said: “***Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the son of Man will give you***.” (Jn 6:27)
* And then He declared: “***I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty***.” (Jn 6:48)