

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

The words Jesus spoke in our Gospel today were spoken during His last moments in the temple - strange that He should spend them sitting in the court of the women, where the offerings were deposited into 13 trumpet-shaped receptacles. Jesus, the Son of God, was reading the hearts of the worshippers.

Jesus also examines the hearts of all today who confess, "I believe in God, the Father... and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." Do we really mean it? Do our offerings of time, talents, and money prove it? Offerings are often a real test of faith.

Many rich people gave much. Jesus did not say their gifts were not welcome or not needed. What He did want His disciples and us to note is that our gifts are acceptable *only* if they come from hearts filled with love and trust. That was true of the poor widow in a very special way.

That she was a widow makes this final episode in the temple dramatic and stirring. Jesus had just spoken to the teachers of the law, who "*devour widows' houses,*" (Mark 12:40). Were some of these among the rich who gave much? We are not told.

What the woman gave, of course, was very little in comparison with what the rich gave. It amounted to "*two small copper coins, which make a quadrans,*" meaning a quarter. We have no equivalent in our currency. The copper coin was called a *lepton*, meaning "small, thin, light." The two were worth one half a *kodrantes*. This in turn was worth one sixty-fourth of a *denarius*, the daily wage of a laborer in those days. Since laborers then did not earn as much as they do today, her offering was indeed a tiny amount.

Here the Greek uses the word *kodrantes*, which is a transliteration of the Latin *quadrans*. Mark often transliterates Latin terms in the Greek text of his gospel. This is an indication that his gospel was written for Roman Christians and possibly in Rome.

The point is, the widow's gift was not tiny in the eyes of Christ. Calling together His disciples - they had a lesson to learn even as we do - He told them that this widow had put in more than all the others. He knew this not because He had asked her but because He as the Son of God could look into her heart. Jesus knows vastly more about us and all others than we know about ourselves.

Why did Jesus say that her gift was "*more... than all the others*"? Unlike the rich, who had more than enough left over, she gave all she had. This was an act of worship, love, faith, and absolute trust. Finally, that is what it means to be a disciple.

The Lord measures our gifts by the spirit in which they are given. He does not with these words ask us to empty our bank accounts, but He invites us to give Him ourselves. Then our gifts to His treasury will also be liberal, and our lives will become lives of true stewardship.

This event is particularly thrilling because we know the rest of the story. This was Jesus' last visit to the temple. From there He went forward to offer Himself - all that He is - on the cross to pay the price we could not pay, to make the contribution we could not make. On Good Friday He paid the entire debt and for the moment became even poorer than this poor widow.