

“Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.” Yeah right. We sing this hymn with our mouths: “Take My Life and Let It Be,” but we do not follow through with what we give to the Lord. Except for this widow. She does give her last two mites. She withholds nothing.

But do we see Jesus praising her self-sacrificing action? No. He points her out to His disciples. He shows the contrast between her and the many rich people putting large amounts into the temple treasury. Yet He does not commend her. He doesn’t say a word to her. There is no interaction at all between Jesus and this poor widow.

Which seems rather odd. Throughout the Gospel of St. Mark, we see Jesus interacting with a number of women. The woman with the blood issue. The Syrophenician woman whose daughter He healed. The woman who anointed Jesus’ body for burial with her flask of ointment. These all come to Jesus, and He ministers to them.

But not this widow. She comes into the temple. Jesus is sitting right there. Yet she appears to ignore Him, putting in her last two mites. And off she goes. End of story.

But there is always more to every story, isn’t there? The day is coming when you will give your last two mites. Because you and I cannot take anything, not even a penny, with us when we go. Yet even that will not be the end of your story. Life goes on even when our life here comes to an end.

What about this widow? Do you think her life is about to come to an end? She’s out of money. She has nothing left. Nothing with which to buy food, shelter, and clothing. She has no pension plan, no Social Security, no husband to provide for her. Maybe she should have gone to the store on this day rather than to the temple. She could have done what we see the widow of Zarephath doing in our first reading – making one last meal before she dies. Or perhaps this poor widow figures, “What’s the use? What can two mites buy at the store? I’ll give them to the Lord and then I will die.”

We’ll never know, will we? We never hear of her again. But what we do hear of her does make an impression upon us. You cannot ignore a story like hers. Yet what are we supposed to learn from her story? May I suggest to you that we learn both some positive things and some things that are negative.

The way this poor widow gives is truly in stark contrast to all the rest. She “*has put in more than all of (them),*” says Jesus. Now this can cause us to scratch our heads. The mite, a copper coin, is the smallest, least valuable coin in use at the time. She puts in two of these. The others are all putting in coins of much greater value than hers. How, therefore, can Jesus say that she has put in more than all of them?

If we are having trouble figuring this out, it’s because we are making our math calculations using the wrong set of numbers. We are adding up what they all give and comparing it to what she gives. But that’s wrong. What we should be adding up is not what they all give, but what they all have left over after they give, and comparing that to what she has left over.

There isn't one of them who is hurting, even a tiny bit, after putting their offering into the treasury box. They all have plenty left over. Is that how you and I give, like them? Or are we more like the widow in our giving, based upon what we have left over after we give?

That's not for me to know. I don't want to know what you give; just what you receive. My concern is not with what you put into the treasury box. It's with the treasure of the Gospel that God puts into your ears and into your mouths here in the Divine Service. Because if you treasure the Gospel of Jesus Christ, receiving it faithfully in Word and Sacrament, you will give faithfully of what you have back to the Lord.

I don't care what you give. God cares, but I don't. It's between you and Him. But I will point you to this widow and show you how God gives to you, using her as an example. And that might be why Jesus calls His disciples to point her out to them. Because in a matter of days, He will do exactly what she does. Jesus will offer up Himself as a Sacrifice on the cross. Not a mite will He withhold. Every last drop of His blood will He shed. He gives up everything. And friend, He does this for you no matter what you give up for Him.

Now, I'm curious, and a little suspicious, why this widow ignores Jesus sitting there. Tens of thousands have approached Jesus for reasons less needful than what she needs. My concern is that she is unaware of what Jesus can do for her, and especially of what He will do for her in His sacrificial death. Her giving is very noble. But what we give to the Lord, even if we give up all that we have like this widow, is not able to gain entry into His Kingdom of Grace. Grace is free. It cannot be earned. Not purchased with two mites or with ten thousand gold coins. God's grace is freely given because it is purchased by one thing only – the blood of Jesus on the cross.

So, explain to me how any Christian can think more of what they do and give to the Lord than what He has done and gives to us? How many Christians there are, sadly, who like this poor widow appears to do, ignore Jesus sitting here on the altar in bread and wine, as they focus only on what they do and give to Him. Let this not be you and me. Our giving and our doing for Jesus, noble though it may be, cannot earn His grace and favor. It can only be a response to what He gives to us.

Friend, He truly does give everything. When He comes into this house of God, He does not ignore you sitting there. He takes note of you. He knows your needs. And He knows that you need His grace and favor. You come here with sins that need to be forgiven. You and I do not come to the house of God because we're so good and righteous. We come with nothing but our sins. But we leave with sins forgiven.

I say this to all of you. You, like me, have too often ignored Jesus in our life. You, like me, have thought more of what we do for Jesus than what He has done for us. We have placed our giving above His.

Jesus does not condemn you for this. Nor does He ignore you. He is here because you are here. He is here with forgiveness for you because for you, too, He shed His blood on the cross. He forgives you, my friends. Each one of you is forgiven.

And so, freely give back to Him. But only as a response to His love for you. Even were you to give Him everything, you cannot outgive Him. He gives you what you need to live. And He forgives you, giving you a place in His Kingdom now and forever. Amen.