

SUNDAY 32B ST MICHAEL'S 2024
FR JORDAN GREATBATCH

One day a man had gone begging from door to door, on the road to the village, when a gold chariot appeared in the distance. The man was wondering who was this king of all kings!

1

His hopes rose and was thinking "The bad days are over" and he was expecting spontaneous alms and riches scattered all over the ground.

The chariot stopped where he stood. And eyes rested on the man and the rider got down with a smile. Suddenly the rider extended his right hand and said, "What do you have to give me?" What royal game was this to beg from the beggar the man thought? He was at a loss and perplexed. Finally, the rider slowly took from the man's bag a very small kernel of wheat.

But how great was his surprise when, at day's end, emptying his bag on the ground, He found a very small grain of gold in the middle of the heap of poor grains of wheat. He wept bitterly and thought, "Would that I had the courage to give everything I had."

Generosity takes courage. Because if we all admit it, it can be a scary thing to do. And our gospel reading today tells of two approaches to the idea of being generous.

For it is a story really about two groups of people. It's about scribes and it's about widows. It's important to understand the place of these two groups of people in the scriptures.

2

Here are some things Jesus said about Scribes. Scribes are people who like long robes and long prayers. They are supposed to use their prayers

and their robes to give glory to God. What usually happens though is that they use them to give glory to themselves.

Scribes are those who know the law. It's good to know the law, especially when you can use it to your own advantage, as the scribes sometimes did.

Scribes are in positions of authority and they like to be respected. It's good to respect authority. Scribes of course insist on having respect by taking the best seats in the synagogue. They want the places of honour at banquets. They like you to know who they are.

Perhaps worst of all, Scribes devour widows houses. What more needs to be said?

Have you been mentally picturing some scribes you know? (Pause)

Have you perhaps thought about seeing the scribe in yourself? (Pause)

I know that not all scribes are bad. Jesus commends scribes sometimes. He also said that "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." So Jesus both commends scribes and he also condemns them as we hear today.

Over against the scribes Jesus sets the poor widow. Widows are special people in the scriptures. It is a religious duty to care for the orphans and the widows.

Widows are to be cared for because they have no man to care for them. In Hebrew society it was the man who earned the living. If the husband dies there is no income. Widows are also defenceless. There is no one to protect them or stand up for them.

Nor do widows have a place in society because places in society belong to men. We begin to see how at risk widows were and how defenceless they were.

Have you been thinking about yourself as I talked about widows? Do you sometimes see yourself as poor and defenceless with no status in society? Maybe we could look beyond ourselves and see some others who fit these categories too. Can you identify those without income, the defenceless, the ones with no status in society?

Today they are not always widows.

It's very important to have an image of the scribe, both the ones we see around us and the one within. It's also important to have an image of the widow, our own feelings of being defenceless, as well as an understanding of who these people are with no income, no status in our society.

In the Gospel story the widow is commended for great generosity. Out of her meagre resources she gives everything to God. The value of her gift is not measured in terms of money. The value is measured in terms of her attitude. There is about her an attitude of faith, hope and love. She is prepared to take risks with her meagre resources. She is even willing to give away all that she had to live on. Her coins represent faith and belief.

I suppose her attitude is not unique. One sees parents do this for their children. Parents can give their all to see their children are provided for. We can also see this attitude when someone is sick and another will give all their time and energy in caring for the sick person. I'm sure you can think of a time when you had to give past what you thought was the limit of your resources.

But we notice Jesus doesn't actually commend the widow per se but uses her as an example.

What about these scribes however? Where have these self seeking people gone?

They are so busy putting on a show of their pretence at religion they have forgotten the widow. These are the ones who know the law. The law says they are to look after the widow.

7

Why do they still demand she pay the temple tax?
Why are they not doing something to ease her poverty?

This is the contrast Jesus draws between the scribes and the widow. Complete generosity from her and self-seeking from them. This is the contrast Jesus draws for us.

8

Jesus asks us to give our all in seeking to bring about the reign of God. And God's reign is seen in how much justice there is for those who are our widows. These are the poor, the unemployed, the marginalised, the vulnerable people of our day. It's not to do with how much money we give. It's to do with our attitude towards them. Sometimes our attitude is expressed by our money. Unfortunately, our attitude is sometimes one of neglect. We prefer to give some money and think our work is done.

Today's gospel asks us to consider our own attitudes to what we have.

9

We may never be called on to give away our last coin. But we are called to have the same attitude as the widow. Life is about the willingness to learn how to give. It's not just a willingness to learn how to give our possessions to help those in need. It's also a willingness not to grasp at what we have in wealth or in talents. Giving is as much an attitude of mind as it is a practical action. The attitude of life we seek to learn is that nothing we have is ours to keep forever, not even life. For the time comes when we have to give away everything we have, even life itself. How we do that may depend on how we learn to develop an attitude of giving. 'Would that I had the courage to give everything I had.'