

In the Name of the Living God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I do not play poker, but I used to sometimes watch professional poker playing on television. The drama is interesting, particularly when a player bets it all. Puts all of his or her chips in on the table on a final turn of the cards. The phrase is “going all in”

And, here today, our attention is drawn to someone who otherwise would be overlooked: a poor widow, just one figure in the crowd at the temple, who without ceremony tosses her last two small coins into a metal receptacle intended for offerings. She is, in a very literal way, “going all in”. As soon as she does so, she disappears again into the crowd. Jesus draws our attention to her because otherwise we might never notice her, and he does so to celebrate her faithfulness, her radical trust in God.

There are others about whom Jesus chooses to speak. These others are visible enough, and that is the point. They are a certain kind of scribe, religious professionals gone bad. They like the best seats at banquets, the respectful greetings in public, and the splendor and state of their long robes.

Jesus offers us two models of faith. The scribes are concerned with gaining power over other people in order to enrich themselves. The widow, on the other hand, surrenders power over herself in order that God may work through her. But I think it can be more basic than that: Jesus points to two roads that lay in front of each and every one of us, regardless of our place in society, our role in the church, or our income level. Each of us can become someone whose life misses the mark or, like the widow, become a person of radical faith.

Now into November, this parish are in the process of stewardship, and the preparation of an annual budget...and the “going all in” widow is a great and natural segue into that conversation. You can expect that is the focus from many other pulpits this morning. And, why not? It takes money, and time, and commitment to sustain the church.

But you will notice that Jesus...and I...are not talking about money, at least not directly. That is because the use of one’s money is only a snapshot, only an icon, of the priority of one’s life. Jesus makes the point of distinction of the widow, one that we find hard to make. Today, we have survivor’s death benefits, or pensions, or at the very least, Social Security, to help support us in our older years. But this widow..normal in that culture and time...had NOTHING. She is one whose only dependable source of income is now dead...and yet, she goes “all in”. She goes “all in”, despite her grinding poverty, because of the depth of her relationship with the God who sustains her...and she is thankful in return. Giving all she has, as a person of radical faith.

So, what is the call to us in this gospel message? What is Jesus pointing out?

Well, in return, we must each ask ourselves these questions:

What is the ministry that we have discerned for our life?

We ask, in prayer every Sunday, for God the Father to send us to do the work we have been given to do, to love and serve God as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.

So, what is it for each one of us?

Each of us, regardless of age or station of life, exercises some responsibility toward other people. They may be members of our family, the other students in our school, the other employees at our job, the customers we serve, or neighbors next door. Even the others in these pews.

Think about it. What is your ministry? Or to whom do you minister in the name of Christ?

Then, once we each have focused on that, Jesus..by this lesson...asks the next one:

Are you “all in” like this widow? Or do you just “mail it in”? Go through the motions?

In our relationship with any of these people we can be...at the bottom of our hearts... self-serving, or we have genuine concern and interest.

It is a funny thing about human nature, but I believe one of life’s skills that we each acquire as we grow older is to make that assessment. Somehow, we can just tell when someone we encounter is either just “going through the motions” and just “mailing it in”...or otherwise is really invested, really concerned, is really trying...because it comes from the heart. That is the distinction that Jesus makes with the widow....he saw her for only a moment, but he could just tell.

It is no different for the church. I believe firmly that God will provide through gifts and pledges to this parish as long as we earnestly and continually keep our focus on God through praise, and worship, and good earnest effort in the name of Christ out into the community we are called to serve. People want to be a part of something that is real, and meaningful, and spiritually sustaining. God’s spirit will again become evident in power if, and when, this parish goes “all in”.

This widow does not look to fill the emptiness in herself by taking from others, but instead looks to fill that emptiness by opening herself to God. With the toss of those coins, she surrenders power over herself in order that God may work through her.

There are two choices: use power in order to enrich yourself, or surrender power over yourself so that you may truly serve God. Jesus invites us to join him and that widow in the temple in being an individual people of radical faith, all in the name of the God who wants our hearts first, as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. Amen.