



November 7, 2021

Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

"...she gave from her what all she had to live on." Mark 12:40

Dear Friends;

Jesus is the prophet of God's coming rule. He calls his followers to the path of radical change of which the Kingdom is a symbol. In today's passage from Mark, Jesus sets his critical eye on the injustices of institutional religion. The scribes taught how people should live faithfully the Law of Moses. They held a special place in the community and that came with perks. Rather than see their role as that of service to the people, Jesus describes the scribes as ceaselessly grasping for recognition.

No sooner does Jesus conclude accusing them of "*devouring the houses of widows*" than a widow comes and drops two of the smallest coins in the collection box fulfilling her religious duty. Widows were of special concern in the Scriptures because they were vulnerable. The Hebrew word for widow means "*one who is silent*" or "*unable to speak*." Without a husband or an adult son, or worse no son, widows were unable to speak for themselves. They were not included in Hebrew inheritance laws so they were forced to simply get by day by day.

Jesus comments that the widow "*gave away all which she had to live.*" This is not spoken in praise but lament. How could Jesus in good conscience praise the woman for donating all she had to the Temple when in the next moment he predicts it will be completely destroyed? He is criticizing a religious system that is more concerned with preserving the institution than caring for people. Rather than redistributing collections to the poor they used it on conspicuous consumption.

In our day Pope Francis has been calling the institutional Church to reform. Pope Francis, a prophet of a new kind of Church, calls for "a poor Church for the poor." That has unsettled many modern day scribes. He attacks what he calls the sin of clericalism. Clericalism is the ideology that there is a certain class of people that are to rule everyone else. They are sacred persons who have special powers. They alone mediate God's grace. They must not be challenged or questioned. Everyone is accountable to them; but this class is not accountable to anyone else.

This sinful mentality brought us the abuse crisis and the cover up. Preserving the institution was more important than children. In its latest episode a special commission in France has uncovered that some 3,000 French priests, vowed religious and church workers abused 300,000 children since 1950. Revelations like these in other countries has led to calls for the laity and especially women to share authority in the Church. There are consistent calls for married clergy. There are calls for the church to re-evaluate its understanding and teaching about human sexuality in light of this crisis and modern science. Yet the forces of clericalism resist any change even in the face of a collapsing institution.

In an attempt to further the reform of the Church, Pope Francis has called for a new way of being Church. He wants us to be a Church that listens to everyone. This is what the pope calls the way of "synod"—"walking together." We are called to listen to all the faithful (especially the marginalized), the needs of the world, and listen to the voices outside of the Church. This process was to be launched this last October. Other dioceses and Bishops' Conferences throughout the world have begun this process. But we have heard nothing from our own diocese or the US Bishops' Conference. It appears that it is being ignored like his encyclical on the environment (*Laudato Si*) or the new directives on phasing out the use of the Tridentine (pre-Vatican II) liturgy.

Parishes and pastors that would like to share in this process of synod are left to their own devices. A number of them and I are looking to do some parish gatherings in the New Year. We hope to listen and forward our results to the appropriate authorities responsible for the coming Synod of Bishops on becoming a synodal Church—that is a Church that listens.

Peace,

Fr Ron