

In our Gospel reading we meet a woman with whom we might think we have little in common. She's old. She's a widow. She's extremely poor. The most unusual thing mentioned about her is that even though she is poor, she made a contribution for the poor. Which aspect of this woman's life would you like to emulate? Probably nothing. We want spouses who are living and helpful. We want money and power. However much we have, we are not interested in giving it away.

But whereas Jesus might not be all that impressed with us, he definitely was impressed with this woman. He called over his disciples and pointed her out. **"She's put in more than all the rest, even though other people put in much larger amounts."** Whereas we might be impressed by donations in the millions, Jesus was impressed by a donation that would be about \$2 in today's money.

We might not want to be like her, at least not at first, but Jesus admires her. That gives us reason enough to consider her. We should learn from this woman. She might teach us something we need quite badly.

The first thing we must consider is why this woman gave what she did. She herself was poor, and yet she contributed to the poor. How can this be explained? A person might simply say that she was insane, or perhaps even wrong to have done what she did. She shouldn't have given that money. She should have kept it for herself. But Jesus doesn't seem to think that she's insane or that what she did was wrong, so there must be some other explanation.

It seems to me that the only reason why she could give what she did was because she didn't think she needed it. We might think she needed it, but she didn't. We aren't given her exact thoughts, but maybe she believed that two more dollars would come to her in some other way. We are prone to think in terms of luck or karma, but I don't think this woman believed in those false gods. She believed in the Lord God of Israel. She believed that he would give her that day her daily bread. She was free to give what she did, because she knew God would still take care of her.

This faith caused her to be like another creature whom God has made. She was like the birds of the air. Have you ever thought about what kind of life birds live? They've got their little nests, but that's about it. Every morning they wake up not knowing where their food is going to come from. They do not have pantries or storehouses. You might think that they would be very worried about this, but they are not. The first thing they do when they wake up is offer up a cheerful song of praise to their Creator. A new day of grace awaits them. This woman must have been as cheerful and free as the birds.

Now you might ask: "How?" From a certain perspective it looks as though everything is going wrong with her life. She's old. She's poor. She's powerless. She lost her husband. What more is there to live for? No great change in her fortunes appear to be forthcoming, especially if she keeps giving her money away. But these are ugly thoughts, prompted by our reason and common sense.

Faith has little to do with reason and common sense. The examples of faith that we read about in the Scriptures strike us very often as being close to insanity. This poor woman giving all she had to the poor can seem insane. The similar actions of the woman in the Old Testament reading can strike us the same way. She took the flour and oil that should have fed her son and gave them to Elijah. A classic expression

of faith that defies not only reason but even morality was Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Reason and common sense fight against faith because they operate according to different rules.

We are given this rule regarding faith: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." Those who believe are grasping and holding on to God, whom they can't see. They don't know where the path will go that God puts them on. They don't know the quantity or the quality of the daily bread they will receive, but what is important is they know that the one who is in charge of their lives is their heavenly Father. They know that he loves them. He sent his Son to die as the sacrifice for them. If God has given his Son, his dearest treasure, how can he not give them whatever else they need?

Therefore, whether a Christian is rich or poor, healthy or sick, young or old, powerful or powerless, it is all the same. God is unchanging with his will and his promises. God will take care of them even though their circumstances might change.

Paul says in Philippians chapter four: "I have learned whatever the situation I am in to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Oftentimes that last part, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me," is taken from its context and used for decorations or for sports teams. I'm afraid that when it is read apart from its context that our reason and common sense might interfere so that it is not understood correctly. "I can do all things" sounds as though I can do anything. If I can do anything, then I would like to be some kind of superhuman. I can have a fabulous life. I can win at all athletic contests. I will have a charmed life because "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

But as you heard the context of that passage, it is clear that Paul is not telling us that we can be some kind of superhero. Our reason might chime in here and say, "Here we go with all the hedging and managing expectations. Of course it sounded too good to be true." But believe it or not, he is actually talking about something greater. A superhero is only happy when he or she is winning. What happens when the superhero gets old? What happens when the charmed life is no longer charmed? What happens when your spouse dies? What happens when your kid dies? What happens when you become poor? Included in the "all things" that I can do is to lose, to suffer, to have my life turned upside down.

Consider, again, the old woman. We know that she has suffered. We know that her husband has died. We know that she is poor. Being poor carries along with it all kinds of annoyances and irritations. Nevertheless, she cheerfully put in her last two dollars. God, who had taken care of her thus far, would continue to do so. Through faith in him she was doing "all things through him who was strengthening her." And it was marvelous. Even Jesus was impressed.

This power to do all things, even to suffer negative things, through Jesus, is an important corrective for today's world. We live at the end of a period of time when reason and common sense have been used to great effect. Technology has been developed through reason and common sense that enables us to do

things that previous generations would have regarded as magic. We have accomplished so much. All of us are extremely rich compared to this woman who only had two dollars to her name.

Given all these abilities and all these accomplishments, you would think that we would be happy. But instead it seems that we should be swamped with sadness. There is so much hopelessness. There is so much despair. People wonder what the point of living is. Our birthrates are plummeting. Our liveliness seems to be withering on the vine.

Isn't it strange that at the very time when we have reached the pinnacle of what human being have been able to accomplish thus far, that we are swamped with sadness? For what ails us, I do not think that more technology, more reason, and more common sense will help us. I have reason to believe that that would only make a bad situation even worse.

We have a spiritual problem. Spiritual problems need spiritual solutions. We need what human beings have always needed, which is God's love. We need faith in this God who loves us, to set us free from our fears of suffering, our fears of loss, our fears of the paths that God might set us on, the outcome of which we cannot see. Faith in God's love enables us to be cheerful, and sing like birds, not only when we are winning, but also while we suffer. Paul says "I can do all things." He means that. Included in those "all things" are loss and sadness, while knowing that we will have the ultimately victory because of our God.

Jesus gives us great spiritual abilities. Jesus gives us the ability to say, "Even though I am a sinner, yet I am forgiven and holy." "Even though I am poor, yet I am rich." "Even though I die, yet shall I live." Jesus makes the future bright!

Therefore, do not be afraid. Be bold and very courageous like this woman in our Gospel reading. The God who has taken care of you thus far, will take care of you until the supreme adventure begins in heaven.

