



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone

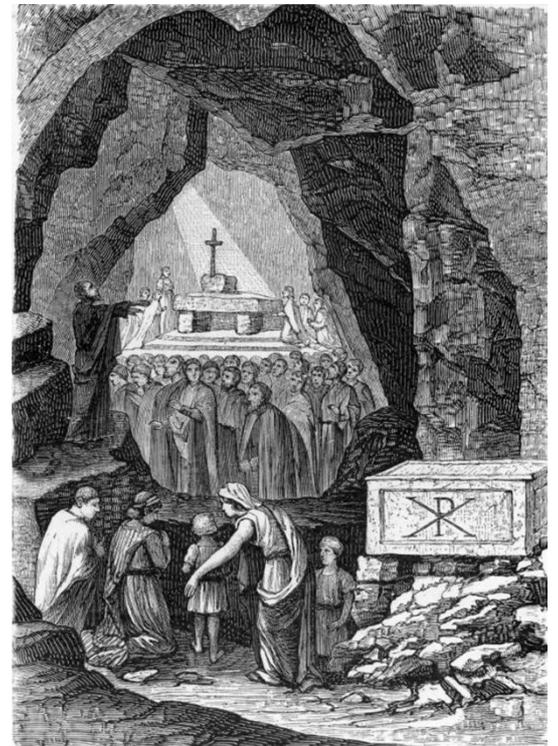


For Sunday 7 November 2021

Pentecost 24

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

**“Truly I tell you, this poor widow
has put in more than all those who
are contributing to the treasury. 44
For all of them have contributed
out of their abundance; but she out
of her poverty has put in
everything she had, all she had to
live on.”** *Mark 12.43-44*



An Illustration to set the scene

Archaeologists have learned new things about the Christian centres in Rome, in the first two “downstairs” centuries of the church’s life before we moved “upstairs” into basilicas.

They have learned that Christians sometimes met in the homes of widows. They may have been widows of Christian martyrs, or of men who had fallen out of favour with the successive tyrannies of the empire, or women who had been child brides to men much older than themselves who had now died?

The law provided civil penalties if they did not soon remarry. But remarriage meant that their dowries and inheritances would soon enrich some other, usually Pagan gentlemen.

Slick televangelists have a similar scam with lonely survivors in our own time.

Marks gospel warns. "Beware of those who devour widows' houses".

As Christian missionaries like Peter and Paul arrived in Rome on their visits, they sometimes stayed in the homes of Christian widows.

These houses thus became meeting places for Christian worship. They were the safe houses for the then illegal Christian revolutionary movement.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Every revolutionary movement has widows.

One of the striking things about Central America is the number of widows, thousands of women whose husbands and sons have been "Disappeared" by military, governments and death squads.

Violent oppression there creates a whole class of widows. The murder of their families has always politicised women to the point that they become willing, if they were not so earlier, to commit themselves, their lives, and property, in witness to the rule of justice to the Kingdom of God in their own time and place.

Jesus urged our attention to one such poor widow in an alien land, and proclaimed God's special attention to her, in his first sermon at Nazareth. He outraged his neighbours by preaching that although there were many widows in Israel at the time of the famine, Elijah was sent to none of them, but to an alien woman of a despised race.

You may remember that his neighbours tried to "disappear" Jesus off a Cliff after that homily.

It was during an ideological war that Elijah made his pilgrimage to the alien town on the Philistine coast.

The wealthy people there worshipped prosperity: Baal was their God.

Today, a fertile brand of Baalist televangelism offers such instant prosperity to its devotees.

In those days, it was rain, always on tap for the crops of the true believer. But Elijah asked the true God of heaven to turn off the tap and show that such manipulation wouldn't work.

3 1/2 years no rain!

Even Elijah got thirsty, even Elijah got hungry!

God then sent him to the alien widow, the Palastinian woman, to be cared for: in solidarity with each other, each would now survive the famine.

Her last shared tortilla never disappears, her last cup of cooking oil keeps filling itself up.

There is food enough so that “she and he and her household ate for many days.”

Can it be that in Central America, in Ethiopia, in Azania, on many strange coastlands today, God is visiting the widows with special favour?

That the humble gifts of the poor, of peasants and of the persecuted, are being used by God to preserve their lives and witness to the world?

Jesus pointed to another window closer to home: the one he noticed in the court of the women at the Jerusalem Temple. *(Was it because his disciples included women that they sat there instead of in the all-male court of Israel?)*

Thirteen trumpet-shaped boxes there received the gifts of the people, and Jesus noticed that rich people came and gave large gifts.

Suddenly, along comes a woman with two little copper coins, the *lepton*, only about 1/4 inch in diameter.

Since this Greek coin was not used everywhere, Mark explains for his readers that they were worth a *quadran*: together, the coins amounted to half a *denarius*, a day's wages for a labourer.

Jesus said that she gave all that she had to live on - 100%! Not a tithe, not the 50% standard of Luke's Gospel, but the 100% standard that Mark always holds up.

Jesus then puts her gift in perspective, along with the gifts of the rich.

The value of the gift cannot be set by its inherent cash value, he teaches us, but by what it represents for the giver.

What do our gifts cost us in terms of commitment? A drop in the bucket? Or a full bucket?

The Palestinian widow gave a bucketful to Elijah. She gave her last meal to share with the GOD-SENT visitor.

Her life in a measure of meal, a cruet of oil, just as the woman with the copper coins gave her all.

Elijah asked for solidarity and sharing, even of the poor. Jesus praised it. God expects it.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

No one gets off the hook by claiming,

“There are people who have more than I do, who should be doing their share in witness and in giving?”

The fact is they will rarely carry the load.

Christianity got on the move in the Roman Empire with the help of the poor.

There are still wealthy patrons of the Kingdom, but God goes especially to seek the help of the poor, that the poor themselves may be helped.

Jesus says the widow of Zarephath was favoured by the prophet's need, by his demand for commitment.

She got to invest in the future, to share in the meals of many days, to pour from her cup until the famine ceased.

Our own sacrificial giving - not stingy parting with privilege, **but commitment to and solidarity with the coming age** - will bring us at last to a banquet of endless blessing, of which we have fore-taste today in the sharing of the bread and wine of the Eucharistic meal.

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Mark 12.43-44

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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