

The Widow's Mite
Mark 12:38-44, Psalm 146
November 11, 2018
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. . . this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 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)

When I was at St. Patrick's Elementary School back in the 50s my teachers—good nuns all—held up for us the story of the widow's mite. I was mightily impressed by this tale of generosity. In my imagination the widow looked like some of the elderly women who came every morning to Mass. Usually dressed in black, and probably looking much older than their true age, they knelt with their rosaries wrapped around their hands. One morning, one of these women died quietly in her pew. Though I don't think I was actually present on that occasion, I can see her, this symbol of faithfulness to the word of God. Like the widow in today's Gospel, she was a treasure among us who gave as much as she could in the name of God. She gave her self and her time.

Two other treasures in our parish were Peter and Paul Brien, good-looking twin brothers who were ordained Maryknoll Fathers and sailed off to Taiwan (Formosa, we called it then) to serve in a mission. Every week one of the sixth graders would go from room to room to collect donations for the brother's work. My teachers encouraged us to give generously, even if it meant for me sacrificing a stop at the Hob Nob, a corner stay on my way home, for a coke and a candy bar (10 cents!). I usually put a dime in the collection, though when I had a few more coins, and was feeling unusually duty-bound, I would drop in my entire allowance (25 cents!).

I wonder whether the twins' parents, both devout Catholics, struggled to balance their mixed joy and sorrow when their sons went so far away from their little town on Lake Michigan to serve in God's mission fields. Like the widow, those parents gave generously—without complaint—to the work of God.

We received in the mail on Friday the yearly report from the Mt. Pleasant Community Foundation. Among the programs featured was the non-profit center on M-20 that offers quality space for organizations striving to support those living in poverty in Isabella County. This center was the brainchild of William and Janet Strickler. Bill died not too long ago, but his wife carries on their legacy quietly, humbly. Like the widow in the temple they gave generously. And, unlike the scribes, they did not allow their wealth to blind them to the crying needs in our community.

Their gift responded instead to the grim reality that 50% of all households in Isabella County are struggling to afford basic needs. Their gift is close to the heart of this parish, for it expands what the homeless shelter is able to do for our guests, giving them a place to drop in during the afternoon, before the shelter opens for the evening. A place where they can seek need from the agencies that can pull them out of their difficult situation. I am thankful to the Stricklers for their generosity and advocacy, for giving beyond what Jesus asked of his listeners.

We are in our pledging time in the parish. Our budget is more important this year because we are facing a search and the calling of a new priest, with all the attendant expenses of that process.

We are also hosting the shelter these two weeks. And we are moving into the holiday season, preparing to provide Thanksgiving meals for six families. That done, we will begin to fulfill the "wish lists" of our adopted families. As we contemplate these needs, it is important that we hold before us the words of Jesus: to give out of our abundance, or to give as the widow did, not counting the cost to herself.

Thursday evening at the shelter I saw an example of two or three men who were down on their luck giving what they could. The Daughters of the King were cleaning up after the meal when these guests came into the kitchen, announcing that “we need to thank these beautiful ladies” who gave us a great meal. And with that they took over washing the dishes. In their temporary poverty, they gave all they had—the work of their hands and their hearts—and so we say “thank you” and “Amen.”

