

## 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time B Rome and Lessons on Stewardship

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A few years ago, my parents and I were at St. Peter Basilica, in line an hour and a half before the canonization liturgy of St. Kateri Tekakwitha. Because of the huge crowd, over 80,000 people, the Vatican hired out the entry security screenings to the Roman police. And there were way too few of them to do the job in a remotely timely manner. It was mayhem, with thousands of people squeezing together trying to get into St. Peter's Square before the Mass began. It took us every minute of that hour and a half, squeezed together with thousands of our newest best friends, to squeeze our way to the security check. During the brief moments when we weren't getting squished, we had a chance to meet a very interesting woman. She was elderly, over 80 years old. She shared with us that after her husband died several decades ago, she was placed in a position where she needed to find work to survive. She went to Rome for this purpose, couldn't find the job in her field, and became a nanny instead. Even in her eighties, she was still a nanny. She shared with us during her time in Rome that she never missed a Beatification or a Canonization of a saint. I found that very inspirational because from my perspective, she was a living saint. My parents and I spent our time in the mob getting into St. Peter's square doing our very best to protect her from getting knocked over by others. We all got into the square just as the Mass was starting, thanks be to God.

I find that the Gospel reading this weekend is very timely as we talk about stewardship of treasure. Jesus tells us what stewardship looks like. He points out to the disciples the crowd of people putting money into the collection box. The Gospel says, many of the wealthy put in sizable amounts; but one poor widow came and put in two small coins worth about a cent. Jesus called his disciples over and told them: "I want you to observe that this poor widow contributed more than all the others who donated to the treasury. They gave from their surplus wealth, but she gave from her want, all that she had to live on." This passage reminds me of the elderly devout widow we met at St. Peter's.

When it comes to our stewardship of time, talent and treasure, Jesus is essentially saying here is that he is less interested in the size of the gifts we give and is more interested in the sacrifice we give. Before we continue, however, I think it is important to point out a common misunderstanding: Jesus did not have any problems with people being wealthy. Sometimes people make that mistake: that Jesus somehow hated the rich. This couldn't be farther from the truth. The people Jesus called to become his apostles were well to do people, sometimes very wealthy like Matthew. Many of the women that accompanied Jesus were also wealthy, like the woman who anointed Jesus with costly perfume. Joseph of Arimathea was also very rich. It was Joseph's tomb that Jesus was buried in. Jesus doesn't have a problem with people who are wealthy. Jesus does have a problem with people who are not charitable.

The poor widow in the Gospel today was praised by Jesus because she was extremely charitable, even in her poverty. The widow in the Gospel reading was praised because, although we are talking about a couple of coins equaling a penny, she was proportionately sacrificing a lot more than the wealthy people that day and therefore Jesus takes notice and points her out.

I think a useful example could be this: for the twenty three years I have been able to vote, I have participated in every election. There are soldiers all around the world who have perhaps only participated in one or two elections given their youth. These soldiers however have sacrificed more for our country than I will in a lifetime. That is how I feel anyway. As we approach Veterans Day, we should ask ourselves how we have been good citizens. Are we doing our part? Again, the question isn't about equal gift but equal sacrifice given our own unique situations. Are we supportive of our community, our schools and our places of worship like we ought to or are we effectively asking others to carry our weight because of our selfish indifference?

You see, during our trip to Italy a few years back, my parents and I discovered vast extremes. Anyone who has spent some time in Rome knows what I am talking about. Some restaurants there serve the best food you have ever eaten for ridiculously cheap prices. You find them by wandering away from the tourist sites in the back alley ways until you hear Italian being spoken at the tables. If you eat in the touristy areas, you will probably end up at a restaurant that serves you microwaved canned Spaghettios and then charge you a fortune for it. You will find people there who will try to scam you for every Euro you have in your possession, and they are very crafty at it. Others, like the widow we met in line to St. Peter's square, would give you the jacket off her back if you asked. There are many like her in Rome too. Italians are by and large very hospitable people. The point I am making is, in the world in which we live, there is a continuum of people who are givers and takers. Gospel readings such as today and life experiences we all have beg us to consider, who are we on that continuum? Perhaps a better question would be what kind of person would we prefer to be as we journey with the crowd to St. Peter's gates? In the Gospel reading today, Jesus gives us his perspective.

When it comes to our sharing of our time, talent and treasure at home with family, as a citizen in our community, here at church or even in the spirit life: are we givers or are we takers? Today we remember a generous impoverished widow. We also contemplate God's generosity to us. We can never pay back God's generosity to us. The invitation this week is to find ways we can be generous to others as disciples of Jesus.