



# Fr David's Homily for Week 4 of the Parish Stewardship Campaign

## Our Church | Our Challenge | Our Choice

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 21.1-4**

### **Jesus and the Poor Widow**

*A reading from the  
Holy Gospel according  
to Luke.*

***Glory to you, O Lord.***

*Jesus looked up and  
saw the rich putting  
their gifts into the  
offering box, and he  
saw a poor widow put  
in two small copper  
coins. And he said,  
"Truly, I tell you, this  
poor widow has put in  
more than all of them.  
For they all contributed  
out of their abundance,  
but she out of her  
poverty put in all she  
had to live on."*

*The Gospel of the  
Lord.*

***Praise to you, O  
Christ.***

As human beings we all like to receive gifts. And if we're honest, we all like to know the value of a gift that we've been given. There's a wonderful scene in Victoria Wood's *Dinnerladies*, in an episode set just before Christmas, where the character Dolly does just that. She's received a Christmas gift from her sister-in-law, and has opened it to realise it's worth more than she thought (where she usually finds herself at bathcube level, she's been upgraded to a cafetiere!). When asked why she's opened it, she replies with the words, 'well how else do I know what price range I'm batting back against? I'd done her a germicidal hand cream, but no, actually, that's not wasted, I can divert that to the paper boy.' Lucky paper boy!

And if we're honest, we can all be a bit like Dolly, grudgingly buying gifts for family and friends at Christmas and birthdays, based on the simple fact that it is expected of us, and not out of any genuine desire or thought. And yet, we also constantly remind ourselves that it is the thought that counts in gift-giving.

Our Gospel reading today is the one which speaks most about that thought counting. Jesus is in the Temple, watching the people offering their gifts. There is clearly a lot of money changing hands on that day. Rich benefactors are bringing their gifts forward, and clearly not hiding the fact that they have large sums of money to offer. Of course it would be much more difficult to hide 2000 years ago, as there wouldn't have been the same cheque system, or contactless giving – they would have had to bring the cash in.

And bring it in they have. Lots of it, and we can almost picture them proudly handing it over to the attendants. And in amongst them all is a poor widow. She steps forward and offers her gift.

For her it is not the great amounts of money that the rich people around her have brought. It is rather two small copper coins. We can again imagine her trying to slip them into the Temple coffers surreptitiously, not wanting to draw attention to the fact that she is offering so little. It is inconsequential compared to the amounts that are being offered around her.

And yet, it is this poor widow that Jesus identifies, and recognises for giving so much. For the rich people, offering their large amounts, are simply offering their small change. It will be of no consequence to their standard of living (or if it is, only to limit their partying by a drink or two). But for that poor widow, what she offers is phenomenal. It is, as Jesus reminds us, all she had to live on.

That woman has brought to the Temple the small amount of money that she (and probably her family) would have used to live for the next goodness knows how many days. She has offered effectively her life to God. And nobody around would have noticed – and of course if they had, would probably have criticised her for the small amount she put in.

But Jesus notices, and highlights it to his disciples, for the generosity that she is showing. It is a generosity borne out of pure love – unlike the false generosity shown by the rich benefactors who are simply giving what they have to spare.

Now of course this passage could be used to prove that God is not interested in the amount that is given, rather that it comes from heart and it is a short step from this to justifying us offering a small gift to the church as long as it is done in secret. And of course all that is true... to an extent.

Yes, our almsgiving must be done in secret, and God is not interested in the simple amount that we give. But what God is interested in is our generosity. And if we simply offer a small gift because we can get away with it, then are we being truly generous, or are we in danger of being like the rich benefactors, simply giving as little as we can get away with?

Some have suggested that the two copper coins, two lepta, in Greek, were the minimum that would be accepted at the Temple treasury. But apparently just the one would have been acceptable, and so already we can recognise the poor widow as offering more than she needed to, in order to fulfil her requirements.

But what does this mean for us, as we come to the final Sunday of our Stewardship campaign? Well, there is a sense in which it is a challenge to us in two ways.

First, there is the challenge, as we have had time and time again over these four weeks, to be generous with the gifts that God gives to us. Generous not in the grudging way of Dolly in Dinnerladies, seeking only to give back to her relatives the same value that she receives from them. But rather generous in identifying just what we can sacrificially give to God's Church, recognising that this is the only way in which the Church here in Accrington can operate, and share God's love with the people among whom we live and work.

Secondly, there is the challenge, when we are able, to go above and beyond what is simply 'expected' of us. We might be members of the stewardship campaign, having pledged a certain amount each week. But that does not preclude us offering more if we are able, and if we are prompted by the Holy Spirit.

That poor widow offered double the amount she was required to bring – double the amount, which would have caused her hardship, as Jesus identifies – it was all she had to live on. And yet, in her generosity she was willing to offer it, for the sake of the Temple ministry. While we may, quite sensibly, want to ensure we have enough to pay the bills, to keep a roof over our heads, and food on our tables, how generous are we in sacrificing some of the wealth that goes towards the extras that we enjoy? In our giving to we tend towards the example of the poor widow, or do we rather look towards the rich benefactors, simply giving out of their abundance?

Let us then reflect on this familiar Gospel passage, and examine our own giving, and let us pray that the Holy Spirit may prompt us to be more like that poor widow, offering generously back to God the gifts that, after all, he himself gives to us. And in doing so, may we be confident that it will enable us to share the love of the God who is so generous he doesn't hold back even his only Son, who died on the cross so that we could have a gift that no money can buy – the gift of eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven. Amen.