

November Word of Life

They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on. (Mk 12: 44)

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This verse comes at the conclusion of chapter 12 in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is in the Temple in Jerusalem where he is both observing and teaching. Looking at the scene through his eyes, we become aware of the involvement of many different characters: people are simply passing through, some have come to worship, some are dignitaries in long robes and some are rich people throwing their substantial offerings into the temple treasury.

But here comes a widow; she belongs to a category of socially and economically disadvantaged people. Amid general disinterest, she throws two pennies into the treasury. Jesus, however, notices her and calls the disciples to him and instructs them:

They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.

‘Truly I say to you...’^[i] These words introduce important teachings. Jesus’ gaze is focused on the poor widow and he invites us to look in the same direction because she is a model for disciples.

Her faith in God’s love is unconditional; her treasure is God himself. She surrenders all that she is and has to him and, furthermore, she wants to give all she can to support those who are poorer than her. In a way, her trusting surrender to the Father anticipates the same gift of self that Jesus will soon make through his passion and death. It is that ‘poverty of spirit’ and ‘purity of heart’ that Jesus proclaimed and lived.

This means ‘placing our trust in God’s love and in his providence but not in our wealth... We are “poor in spirit” when we allow ourselves to be guided by love for others. This results in our sharing and making what we have available to those in need; it may be a smile, our time, our possessions or our skills. When we give away whatever we have out of love, we become poor, with nothing of ourselves, with a free and a pure heart.’^[ii]

Jesus’ proposal turns our usual way of thinking onto its head; those who are poor, insignificant and unimportant lie at the centre of his thoughts.

They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.

This Word of Life invites us to renew our total trust in God’s love and consider if our vision of

life compares with his: do we see beyond appearances, do we avoid judging, do we take other people's opinions into consideration if they are different from our own and do we see the positive in other people?

It suggests that there is an evangelical logic in freely giving to others and that doing so creates a peaceful community because it urges us to care for one another. It also encourages us to live out the words of the gospel in everyday life even when other people may not notice, to trust when we are generous to others and to share whilst maintaining an attitude of balance and clear judgement. This word focuses our attention upon the 'least' and asks us to learn from them.

Venant was born and raised in Burundi. He recounts: 'In the village, my family had a good farm that always produced a good harvest. My mother believed that everything was providence from heaven and so, each year, she would gather the first fruits and distribute them to our neighbours, starting with the neediest families and then allocated only a small part of what remained to us. I learnt the value of selfless giving from her example. Thus, I understood that God was asking me to give him the "best part", indeed to give him my whole life.'

Edited by Letizia Magri & the Word of Life Team

[i] Introductory words of previous verse: Mk 12: 43.

[ii] C. Lubich, *Word of Life*, November 2003.