

**“EARTHLY WIDOWS,
BUT BRIDES OF CHRIST”**
Lk 12:38-44
(1 Kings 17:8-16; Heb 9:24-28)

Do you like to watch people? I enjoy watching people—the see how they dress, how they interact, etc. Jesus did some people watching in our Gospel today. He sat down in the temple and did some people watching. The thing is, Jesus sees things that we can't see... things that we don't want to see... So when Jesus sits down to watch, you know a powerful teaching is coming our way.

And so it is this day—this Tuesday in Holy Week. Jesus sits in the Temple, opposite the treasury, and watches people drop in their offerings.

First, what's interesting to note here (and unusual as well) is that Jesus can watch this at all, because this giving used to be done in secret, not in public. The fact that it's now open for all to see (and attract the envy of men), is a signal that something's gone wrong in Israel. And people DID watch. The rich loved to be seen dropping their large offerings into the receptacles making sure to make a loud clanking sound with their many coins. Jesus was, perhaps the only one to notice the two small coins that the widow put into the treasury.

Second, it's odd that a poor widow is putting money into the treasury, because this money wasn't meant for the upkeep of the Temple, but as alms for taking care of the poor - like this widow! The fact that she's contributing is a signal that something has gone wrong in Israel.

And third, it is remarkable because the day on which Jesus does this is the Tuesday of Holy Week. Just two days ago He entered Jerusalem humbly on a donkey to the shouts of Hosanna, and in just two days He'll institute the Lord's Supper; in just two days He'll be arrested; and in three days, be crucified. Yet Jesus chooses to sit and watch—to sit and watch the offerings.

But in three days, who will sit and watch His offering? His offering, which He gives to help the poor - us poor, miserable, wretched sinners. His offering, when not with copper or bronze coins, or even gold or silver does He fill the treasury of the Lord, but as Luther reminds us in the 2nd Article of the Apostles' Creed, it's when "...His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death" fills that treasury. His offering, when He gives all that He is and all that He has as our epistle reminds us He "enters the [heavenly] holy place with His own blood" to atone for all your sins - all of them! - that as our great High Priest He deals with sin once and for all. WHO WILL BE WATCHING HIS OFFERING? Not the Scribes and Pharisees. Once they got Jesus on the cross, their work was done. They had more important things to do now. And not the disciples, they all - but John - ran away in fear. But you know who will be there? A widow! ...by the name of Mary—A sword piercing her heart in sorrow.

The Son of God on the cross! - A signal that something has gone wrong... and not just in Israel, but with the whole world. That our sin has made US very horribly wrong.

So the first thing which we must understand is that the point of this story is not that you be like this poor widow and give all that you have, because this isn't about you—and it never has been. The point of this story is that you realize that you are a poor widow. Because regardless of what you have in this world, be it little or much, spiritually speaking you are a poor widow. Because your sin has made it so. The perfect marriage of God and man all the way back in the Garden was killed by sin - each sin like the very first sin, which is evidence of your rebellion; each sin like the very first sin, estranging you from God; each sin like the very first sin, is your testimony that God is not trustworthy, not good, not the provider of what you need. And so you sin to get what you think you want, but your sin leaves you empty. Momentary riches and fleeting pleasures is all sin leaves you with. And when your sinful lover, Satan, is done taking from you and using you, he leaves you for another, leaving you a poor widow.

Such is the way of the world and of our sin, and loveless widowhood would be our eternal reward if not for the One sitting in the temple that day, watching the offerings. The One who came to be the Bridegroom for us poor widows; to give Himself for us widows as an offering for our sin on the cross; to wash us clean and make us pure virgin brides again.

What a wonderful thing to learn of that love, but even more wonderful to learn that this love is from the very God we reject in our sin. Although we've left Him, He hasn't left us, but has come to us, chased after us, and lays down His life for us, that we might be His again.

Yet as wonderful as this love is, it can also be troubling because we can't understand it. Why would God do such a thing? Why would Jesus love me? It makes no sense to us, and so we go looking for something lovable in us; something, anything; some good work, some difference, some reason... but there's nothing. And so you may think: it's not for me; it can't be for me; I'm just a poor, dirty, unworthy, used up, sinful widow.

But remember the Temple treasury the widow put her coins into? Those offerings were meant to care for her, not take from her. And so it is with the true, heavenly Temple treasury, which Jesus filled with "His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death." It is for you. For you who have nothing. For you who are widows. For you who need the washing of forgiveness. Jesus didn't come because you deserved it, but because He never stopped loving you, His bride. His love is the reason He came, which is why we can't understand it. It's not of this world. And yet it is true, and real. As true and real as His resurrection. As true and real as His body and blood given here for you today. That you may be His own.

And so while you may not have a seat of honor at the feasts of this world, you have a place at this feast, which will never run out. Like the widow of Zarephath and Elijah, each time you come back, the feast is here for you. To feast on the Word of your Lord.

To feast on His forgiveness. To feast on His body and blood. To feast in His love. Until we move from this table to the next—to the heavenly banquet table, and the feast that has no end.

Now, the world can't see all that in this Supper—it sees just a poor banquet not worth much at all—just a small bite of bread about the size of a widow's mite, and a tiny sip of wine. But as Jesus sat in the Temple that day, He saw what the world couldn't see. Because while the world saw a poor widow, putting into the treasury nothing that would make a difference at all, Jesus saw His Bride putting in all she had. And putting in all she had not because she had to, but because she could. Not to win God's love, but because it was already hers. And so she shows who she is, and loves with the love that's been given to her. And in the midst of all those who gave out of their abundance, she shows herself to be the richest one of all—A Bride of Christ.

And the same is true for you. You may be someone in this world or no one. You may be rich or poor. You may be loved or despised. You may be useful or useless. But Jesus sees in you what the world cannot see: His Bride. And so for you He has come. For you He has located His body and blood on this altar, to give you what you don't have, to cleanse you, and to betroth you to Himself once again, so that each time His holy body is placed into your mouth and His holy blood is poured over your lips, you hear His loving, self-sacrificing "I do." I do love you. I do forgive you. I do take you. Each time, every time. His love, His feast, His forgiveness never running out.

And you know what? That makes you, in the midst of this world of abundance, the richest ones of all. Rich in faith. Rich in hope. To give as you have been given to, and to live not in fear, but to be who you are: no longer a widow, but a dearly loved Bride now and forever. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.