



THE NEW SHOFAR

Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a servant

St Francis: it is in dying that we are born to eternal life

November 7th

A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cent

This is the last act in the public ministry of Jesus prior to his crucifixion and so it takes on a significance greater than we might have first thought. At the heart of what he is teaching has to do with “giving”. In this case, he is contrasting the giving of the rich with the giving of this poor widow... *she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.* She is now left with nothing to sustain her. Her future is entirely in the hands of the love and generosity of her neighbours.

Jesus is not concerned with the amount people give. All he asks is that they give everything they have. Sounds like an impossible demand. After all, we need to feed ourselves and take care of our basic needs. Don't we? Jesus knew all of that – just as he knew that widow would now go hungry as she had given everything away as a sacrificial offering to God. Whatever her future held, we can presume one thing, she would launch herself into it filled with hope and faith.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit

Knowing we are about to follow Jesus along the road to Golgotha and his agonizing death, we can glimpse an insight into what the Lord is saying. He is offering everything he has – his very life – to his heavenly Father. He keeps nothing back of himself, for himself. There are no conditions to what he gives, no hidden ways out of his pledge of obedient service. The Greek of the New Testament has a word for this kind of giving: *kenosis* and Jesus is the perfect example.

St Paul, when writing to the Christians in Philippi told them how Jesus was God and yet he did not *count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* This is what Jesus had in mind when he was speaking about the self-giving of the widow. Not only did he humble himself by becoming a mere human, but he went on to die in one of the most horrendous ways possible. He emptied himself. For us.

Jesus gave his life so that we might know life to the fullest

This kind of giving takes the focus of the person giving and shifts it to the person receiving blessings through the sacrifice of the one giving. This is the very opposite of much of today's dominant western cultures. Too much of the present age is about the self, bringing things into my life. The more

the merrier! When something new comes along we encouraged to throw out the old things to make room of more. And more. And more. Or perhaps we hold onto the old as well! It is as if we are at our best and our fullest when we bring things into our lives.

*Lord, make me an instrument of
your peace:
where there is hatred, let me
sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may
not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to
understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are
pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are
born to eternal life.*

Jesus witnesses to the very opposite. He reminds us how it is in giving of the self that others find life, find hope and tap into salvation in all its many faces. That is why *kenosis-emptying* holds such a central place in the Gospel story of Jesus. St Francis of Assisi preached this same message in his magnificent Peace Prayer.

It is not about money or even “things”

The value of the widow’s mite cannot be measured by its monetary value. It was nothing - 1/64th of what a person might earn for a day’s work. About 1.1 cents! All that does is further stress what Jesus is saying. He does not want 1.1 cents. He wants our complete and whole selves. Nothing more. Nothing less. We are to give as he himself gave and it is in giving of ourselves to others, and for others that life springs forth in unknown and unexpected places. That is how God works.

For the remainder of this Gospel, Jesus will spend time strengthening and honing his teachings to his Apostles. He knew how important it would be for future leaders of the Christian communities to offer living witness to this servant model of pastoral care. If our pastors (future Bishops and clergy) are unwilling to commit to a *kenotic* (self-sacrificing emptying for the sake of others) form of ministry, the Church will wither for a lack of realistic leadership. Sadly, that is where we are today. The Church *and* the world pine for, cry out for *kenotic* leaders but too often find instead men and women living primarily for themselves. Too much time in offices instead of out on the streets; too much time in coffee shops and pub lunches; too much time on the internet instead of sitting down face to face with God’s little ones offering hope, encouragement, joy and peace in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we move towards the feast of Advent with the closure of one liturgical year and the opening of a new one, surely it is time to begin to re-evaluate our lives before God and the manner in which we live out our baptismal commitments? Led by those who have been ordained to serve, every baptized man and woman in our parishes and faith communities we are called out by the Gospels leading up to Christmas to begin the task of revitalizing the Church starting with ourselves. The expectation of Jesus is that we become fruit-bearing vines, producing the kind of fruit the world needs, rather than the fruit that suits us best. We are to feed the world with the Bread of Heaven, work as leaven and salt in the midst of the world and plant the faith-seeds Christ will grow.