

The last edition of GoodNews4You will be published for Nov. 21, the Feast of Christ the King. Please enjoy the following reflection first run in 2018.

## Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Mark 12:38-44

As usual, in this week's gospel Mark packs two very significant messages into two very concise stories. They are connected by the unusual thread of widows and raise issues around commitment and true discipleship, two of Mark's favorite themes.

In the first story, Jesus holds up the scribes as an example of hypocrisy and destruction. Scribes were educated religious leaders and, as such, they enjoyed great honor in their communities. They sported special clothing that announced their status. They got special treatment wherever they went. However, they did not use this power to build up the community. Rather, they "devour[ed] the houses of widows," who were among the most vulnerable people in Jewish society. Only men could earn income, widows had no way to replace assets or money. The scribes, not content with their status, charged high fees under the pretext that they must be paid exorbitantly for their professional services.

Jesus draws our attention to a typical pattern of behavior, all too common in our communities today. Jesus is not talking about big celebrities or the mega-rich, although I am sure he would not be happy with our culture's huge wealth gap. Rather, Jesus draws our attention to the way we create local celebrities, people who are significant at work or school or church, who grab at power and want to be acknowledged, while others are ignored or excluded. Note he is talking *to* the crowd *about* the scribes, as if to say, "Don't get caught up in this. Don't strive for this yourselves. Look at the hidden destruction that grows from this."

This is a tricky aspect of life to negotiate. We all need some power to control our lives in a healthy way. We all need some recognition from others for a healthy ego. It is also natural to admire and value the skills of others. When we use love of God and love of neighbor as our criteria for action, we will manage power and recognition appropriately. When we let power and recognition become priorities, the exclusion of others and the devastation of others naturally follow. Pope Francis has spoken often about the "[globalization of indifference](#)," a modern inability to see all the people who are hurt by our extreme focus on ourselves and our own comfort, power, prestige, etc. Look, Jesus says, look!

The second story in today's gospel is so challenging in its straightforwardness, we may be tempted to apply some globalized indifference to it. I was blessed to grow up in a family that tithed ten percent, even when we were very poor. When John and I married and I declared that I wanted to continue to tithe, John balked. We compromised and, to his credit, John has grown into a joyful giver. Lest you think I am bragging, know that whenever I read this gospel story, I am stunned. The widow, "from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood," Jesus says. By that reckoning, I have 90% more to give. Yowzah!

This is a story about vocation. Mark places it on the brink of Jesus' passion, when he too will contribute all he has, literally his whole life. This story begs the question, "How much of your life are you really committing to God?" I am currently teaching the idea of vocation to my students and I want them to see that no matter what field they are called to, they must strive to build God's Kingdom with their whole heart and soul, mind and strength. We modern people love to pigeonhole our lives: I go to church over here. I do my work in the real world over here. I make my political choices over here. I raise my family over here. All the "here's" never interact. Not good enough, Jesus says. If love of God and love of neighbor really are our top priorities, they must be so at work, in our purchasing choices, in our families, in the voting booth, in how we throw out garbage and the transportation we use, in how we treat strangers and in how we much we attend to the people around us in need of our compassion.

- ❖ Spend a day noticing how you judge each person you encounter – their clothes, their style, their personality, their importance. Who gets your attention? Whose attention do you desire? Who gets hurt in the process?
- ❖ In which parts of your life is it easy to give all that you have? What keeps you from being generous in the other parts? Ask God to help you be more generous.