

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

This week in the gospel we see Jesus people-watching. He is not sitting at a street-side café nor in a sun-drenched piazza, rather he is in the precincts of the Jerusalem temple. He sees a woman put two small coins into the treasury. How did he know she was a widow, was she wearing the first century Jewish equivalent to widow's weeds? We do not know her name but thanks to being noticed by Jesus she has gained a place in history and her coins are proverbial in virtually every language: the widow's mite. When reading stories such as this in the scriptures I always like to ask questions about those people who, through a passing mention in the gospels, flit across history. They make brief cameo appearances, and yet two thousand years later so many people are familiar with them.

So, let us start with the widow. Her husband clearly was dead, but did she have children or grandchildren. Why was she so poor? Had her family abandoned her? Jesus observed her, but did he go and speak to her? There are other questions we might ask. As mentioned before in one of these reflections, I have always been fascinated by the rich young man whose virtues were praised by Jesus but who, when challenged by Jesus, declined the invitation to follow him or become, at least in a formal sense, one of his disciples. The young man has got a bad press over the years, especially thanks to his link with so much vocations literature of bygone days. He was the young man who said "No", who could not hack it as a disciple. He is often depicted as being so attached to his "great wealth" that he could not release himself from the hold it had on him. But then no one asks about the employment he provided and the families he supported through his business; no one asks what charitable work he did with his fortune, and no one asks did he enter into the public life of his day and serve society - and the values of the kingdom - in that way. Or Lazarus, how long did he live after, through Jesus' power, he emerged from the tomb; was he married or did he have a family, was he later to become a disciple in one of the early Jewish/Christian house churches in Jerusalem? Was his friendship with Jesus transformed into discipleship? Was he anywhere near Calvary on the first Good Friday?

You might think of a figure from the gospel story and imagine in what way their encounter with Jesus touched, changed or transformed them. We might ask ourselves how the widow managed to survive after putting all she possessed into the temple treasury. And we priests might bear a thought for the widows, poor people or pilgrims who put money into our collection box. Do we respect that money and put it to the best possible use. So many questions to which to try and provide an answer.

Father Patrick