

NOVEMBER 10 2024 FATHER PETER TURRONE

"Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury."

Years ago, back in the seminary, we were studying theology, biblical theology in particular, and our professor was explaining this passage and many others in Scripture. It's interesting because I always heard a different interpretation than the one he presented, but his explanation made so much sense. He was saying the following: just before this scene, Jesus had gone into the temple and purified it. Jesus was angry and overturned the tables because he saw they were turning God's house into a den of thieves, more concerned about money than the salvation of souls. The Lord was very upset about this.

Then, the Lord sits down again, watching. He's not making judgments but observing what everyone is doing. Now, the temple was massive, and the area where Jesus is in today's Gospel is the part of the temple where the women gathered, with 13 massive containers for the collection. These were like trumpets, and people would go in and throw in their offertory. Those with a lot of coins would throw them in, making a loud noise, which would cause people to turn around and notice who was giving all that money. Jesus is watching, and he sees this poor widow drop in her two pennies. It doesn't make any noise, but God sees everything.

I've heard some people interpret this as, "She's given out of her poverty, so the Lord is saying this is a good thing." But that doesn't seem to be the case. If this woman is almost destitute, a poor widow, do we think God wants her to take the last morsel of food from her mouth and give it away? Or is there a different meaning? As our professor explained, it made perfect sense. He said that the Lord is watching, and he's not pleased; he's critical because, as we heard in the first reading, there was a poor widow who gave to the prophet and received an abundance from God, enough food for a year.

The Church, as we've heard throughout the liturgical year, especially in the New Testament and Old Testament readings, has a responsibility to care for poor widows and the vulnerable. The Church is there to help them, not to take away from them, which is what was happening. This religious system was fostering corruption, which is why Jesus was so upset. We see later, as we continue reading, that the Lord predicted the temple's fall, which happened in AD 70. The Lord criticizes this religious system for being unfair and focused on money.

We need money, of course. Money and wealth, in themselves, are morally neutral, but how we make and use our money is not. That's why it's good for us to reflect on this, especially in light of the second reading. The author of Hebrews writes, "The Lord came once. He took flesh, entered the world, and gave us new life in Jesus' name." As a result, we now have the privilege and responsibility to live the Catholic faith, to live out our discipleship in the best way possible. By doing so, as we've heard many times, we are called to care for our brothers and sisters' material and spiritual needs, especially those who lack what they need.

Thankfully, we have many ways and movements within the Church that strive to meet these needs. This doesn't mean that those with little cannot or should not give, but it means that, together, the system—the way the Lord saw it—needed change. For us as well, we should ask: what can we do as brothers and sisters, as members of the household of faith, to help others and encourage a deeper understanding of what we've received from God and how to use it for his glory?

I was a missionary in Mongolia, as you've heard before, and there's one story I'll never forget. After Sunday Mass, a group of our women—12 women who had become baptized—were gathered in the back. These beautiful women were all destitute, with hardly any money, so we were helping them. We heard a lot of chatter and went over to ask, "What's going on here?" They said, "Look, we have 5,000 tugrik," about \$3.20.

They were stunned. Normally, our collection might be 20 cents. The women had seen a collection in the city and wanted to do the same in our church, so we agreed. It was a woman from the city who left the money.

It was interesting to see their reactions and hear their thoughts. They said, "Even though we have very little, we want to give in the way we can." I learned so much from that experience and am very grateful for it. But regardless, we're all called to give what we can, recognizing that what we have is from God. The gifts God has given us are meant to build the kingdom of God here on earth, to glorify God, and to help those who are suffering most.

Why? Because in the end, as we heard in the second reading, the Lord will come again, and we pray that when he appears a second time, it will be a moment of great rejoicing for all those who account themselves Christian.