

May only Gods word be spoken – may only Gods word be heard – Amen,

I'm going to be one of the first to say it – get ready – “Happy Holidays”. We right now are at the top of the slide into the holiday season, and we can really decide today and right now how the ride is going to be. People worry about having enough of everything, during the holiday season we want to be sure to offer our best Martha Stewart for every occasion, be it the 37 people we will happily have over for Thanksgiving, or the thousands of dollars we will spend at Christmas, just to make sure the people around us know we love them!

I thought of this when I read the first section of today's Gospel - “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!” (for our culture, we may want to change this to “Beware of the advertisers!”) There you have it – everything we want in society, or at least for the holidays Long robes – gotta look good! Greeted with respect in the marketplace – must mean we are loved! The best seats in synagogue and places of honor at banquets – how much are the tickets for Nutcracker again? Gotta do it – the family has always gone!

The important part for the scribes, and to be honest for many people, is that they get the best of everything available, with no real consideration for where it comes from. Jesus goes on to say “They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers”. They do what is poor to make their wealth, but go on to say “long prayers” to make sure they are on the Lords good side. They do not walk their talk. They do not do as they teach and profess. Jesus has already warned us regarding them when he offers “Beware of the scribes” but caps this by saying “They will receive the greater condemnation.”

The greater condemnation? Why? They are doing what we often still do in society today – for many, it is self-interest at the expense of all else! We will go through the motions on Sunday, and that will placate our hearts - and hopefully God, at the same time!

The greater condemnation? The problem is less what they are doing and more the disregard and entitled attitude I believe they approach it with. They have the long robes, and the gestures of respect and the best seats, but it's at the cost of widow's houses. They tend to their own needs and desires, but with limited, (if any), thought to others. Jesus calls us to see that the world does not hang on our own needs and wants, but extends a little further. “The greater condemnation” turns out to be the destruction of the temple itself – the very thing they have built their identity on.

To be fair, I can hardly claim perfection in this category of tending to my own needs and desires first. Remember how cold it was last winter? I heard assorted news reports about people having trouble keeping warm, especially those who were homeless, and realized I had 3

winter coats in the closet. How many people could be that little bit more comfortable if I gave up one of my “long robes”. I’m able to eat, I have a roof over my head. And there are many who cannot claim this. I try to do what I can to help when I see the opportunity, and be aware of my blessings. And I hope you do the same.

Let’s be clear, none of this means we have to disregard ourselves – just maybe think of ourselves a little less often. If we are all children of God, and we are, no one is more entitled than anyone else. Some times it is a struggle to remember that we are all children of God, but we do not get to decide who is or isn’t a child of God. When we meet at the table each week, all are welcome without exception. Jesus did not have a list of qualifications for those who became his disciples!

So how do we show ourselves to be children of God? In the Gospel of John we hear “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so also you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.” We will be known not by our robes, not by the respect with which we are greeted, not because we have the best seats anywhere, not by our money, but by our love. Love that we have by the grace of the Lord - how will you show and share that love today?

But today’s Gospel continues with the story of the crowd putting money into the treasury. Think of this money as a sort of tax, a tax to support the temple, oddly enough levied by the same scribes who will devour widow’s houses. We hear “Many rich people put in large sums” which in context, would have called for respect for the way they could support the work of the temple.

But in the midst of these large sums “. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.” This is what attracts Jesus’ attention. He tells the disciples “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had”

It can be easy to give when you have a lot – you don’t even have to think about it. But this woman has gone further and has given everything she had, and I am sure that took some thought!

But we all end up doing things by rote, actions without really thinking about it – don’t you think? I’m sure the wealthy in the Gospel could give their large sums without much thought. When we put money in the plate when it comes around, do we think about what we are doing? Do we acknowledge that we have received many blessings, Thank God for those blessings, and then give a prayer of thanks for the blessings of this place we love and support?

I like to imagine this is what the woman did when she put in her “two small copper coins”. She knew this was important and thought about it deeply before she put the money in.

She knew, perhaps, that these coins were a blessing to her – and she wanted to pass that blessing on – “paying it forward” if you will.

She was not blessed in a way that allowed her to put the money in without thinking about it – which I can easily imagine the wealthy doing – more of a reflection on our society than a contextual observation, unfortunately!

She needed to think about this action, because she was giving more than the coins, she was offering her heart along with it. She could do this I imagine, because in her blessings she knew that she as worth infinitely more than any amount of money – and that is the important blessing, and oh, so easy to forget. She was worth more than any amount of money – and so are we.

The wealthy we not worth more than she was – they were children of God just like she was. This is the way we are meant to see ourselves and see each other. Not using the amount of money we have or don't have as a measure of our worth. But realizing how blessed we have been and continue to be and give thanks to God for each and every one of these blessings.

I started off by saying “happy Holidays”, and I'll close by suggesting that during the holidays, we work together on giving from the heart, instead of giving from the purse. And when youre temped in the direction that society favors, take a moment to ask yourself where the gift will be from, the purse or the heart, and remember the gifts and blessings you have received – and where they are from.

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