

True Giving

“Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

-- Luke 21:3-4

There is no better time to reflect on the nature of true giving than during Lent. During Lent we move ever closer to the cross of Christ, and we prepare ourselves for an encounter with Jesus at Easter. It is at Easter that we come face-to-face with the greatest act of sacrificial giving ever known, and this very fact gives us the perfect opportunity to reflect on our own giving, which – if it is to be true giving – must always be sacrificial.

The surprising hero of our text is a widow who had given ‘more’ than anyone else even though she had put in only two small copper coins while others had put in much larger sums of money... Now, unless we have serious trouble with our math skills, this might seem a little odd. How is it that two small copper coins can be more than a handful of gold coins? How is it that a small amount can be more than a large amount? Simple... It is worth more because the two small copper coins required sacrifice (“all she had to live on”) while the larger sums didn’t require any sacrifice at all (they gave “out of their abundance”). It was worth more because it was true giving; it was true giving because it demanded sacrifice.

Someone once said, “If it doesn’t hurt then it isn’t giving, it’s merely sharing.” The nature of our giving must always be sacrificial; whether it be of our finance, or our time, or our skills, whatever it might be – if it doesn’t hurt then it isn’t really giving at all. This is what set the widow’s offering apart from all the others – it actually cost her something.

But why must our giving be sacrificial? Because our giving is only ever in response to God’s giving. When it comes to our offering we do not pay it forward, we do not settle our dues, we do not buy favours... we respond to God’s giving. Our giving is a direct and immediate reflection (not to mention a very good measure) of how deeply we have been moved by God’s self-giving sacrifice. We give in response because God gave first; God gave all he had... how much then should we give?

Food for thought:

C.S. Lewis once said, “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.”