

(Preceded by the skit "One Thin Dime" by Daniel Wray in the book *Service With a Smile*.)

Our little skit does an excellent job of setting the stage of understanding the widow in our gospel reading who gives all she has - two tiny coins, all she has to live on. What would motivate such giving? Where is supper going to come from for her? This is not a tithe. This is not a calculation - accountant or not. This is everything! This woman is motivated by a need to give.

We're in the midst of our stewardship drive for next year and this gospel reading couldn't come at a better time. What goes on in your mind as you consider what your giving will be to church next year, or any time you give of your hard earned money?

Biblical scholar Pheme Perkins writes, "This story poses the same challenge to readers today as it did in Jesus' time. People usually think of giving to the church and to charities as an option. The money for charitable giving comes out of the surplus after personal expenses have been met. Those

'necessary' expenses usually include many extras in terms of entertainment, clothes, food, and toys." (New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 8, Pg. 683)

Giving for this widow doesn't seem to be an option at all. She gives because she needs to give. That is a blessed place to be, and a place to which we should all aspire. Then giving isn't a chore, but it becomes a deeply fulfilling way of life.

In the second book of the best-selling Divergent series the character Peter dramatically saves the life of the main character, Beatrice Prior by rescuing her as she is about to be executed. He does so at great personal risk. She asks him why he does this, because up until that point they had been vehement enemies. Why did he do it? Because earlier on she had saved his life. He felt like he owed her, and he didn't want to live owing anyone. We discover that his whole life is about give and take, leveraging and manipulating. You trade favors with others and you keep track of who owes who. Within Beatrice's own thoughts she says she thinks that must be a horrible way to live, and hopes she is never like that.

It could be said that since Jesus has given everything to save you, you owe him everything in return. That makes for a

very logical exchange. But if you live that way you'll come to resent and despise God - you'll feel forever in debt and treat God like a horrible taskmaster. After all, none of us asked Jesus to die for us. None of us wanted to be in this debt in the first place.

We know nothing of this widow's past. But for some reason she had a need to give. Nothing will stop her from doing that. When we can see what Jesus has done for us as a gift out of love - and not something to place us under obligation - then we are on the way to giving because we have to. Giving then becomes fulfillment of our deepest selves.

I see lots of people who spend everything they can on themselves - on a way of life, on entertainment, on looking prosperous - and I wonder how empty they must feel inside. If a person spends every penny he or she can afford on entertainment and little gadgets then what gaping whole do they have inside that they are trying to fill; or perhaps run from?

Consumption doesn't lead to contentment. It leads to a bigger hole. Giving in its purest form is motivated by a need to give. Ironically it is a way to be complete.

What do you need to give of your money, your time and your abilities in order to feel whole? May you have the courage and the confidence to give because you have to - because it is the way to be most powerfully and wholly you - who God made you to be. Amen