

The Federal Reserve Bank destroys about \$95 million dollar's worth of worn-out currency every day. One day a twenty-dollar bill arrived at the bank for its final day of existence and began to reminisce about its travels all over the country. "I've had a pretty good life," the twenty proclaimed. "Why, I've been to Las Vegas and Atlantic City, the finest restaurants in New York, performances on Broadway, and even a cruise to the Caribbean." "Wow," said the one-dollar bill. "You've really had an exciting life!" "So tell me," says the twenty, "where have you been throughout your lifetime?" The one-dollar bill replies, "Oh, I've been to the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, most of the time the Catholic Church and..." The twenty-dollar bill interrupts, "What's a church?"

In the eyes of a child (or a parish business manager!), taking up the collection is probably one of the principal parts of the Mass, perhaps not quite so much in these days of online giving. But ushers coming down the aisle and getting to put something in the basket is **action**—something to wait for, to watch and to do.

The collection is also interesting from an adult point of view, I suppose. Are those other parishioners the rich ones giving of their abundance or the poor widow giving of her want? And which am I?

If I were still a pastor, this would be the perfect scriptural lead-in to preaching to the congregation about the parish financial needs, although preaching to a bunch of women who have taken a vow of poverty may not yield the greatest result. But you can relax, even those of you who have not taken that vow. I really don't hear the scriptures that way. I think this story is about more than money and contributions and almsgiving—as important as those things might be.

This brief scene, which Mark describes, is one of contrast and paradox. The “showing off” of the scribes contrasts with the quiet generosity of the poor widow. The **paradox** is that she, who gave so little, gave so much. The focus is on the widow who handed over her last cent for the *poor*. Who was poorer than she? (Widows had no property; dependent on others...) Her gift is contrasted to the gift of the wealthy, who still had plenty. Their offering was good; her offering was lovely. She was heroic, but no one in the crowd noticed her. She didn’t get any of the glory the others sought. But *Jesus* obviously noticed her and admired her humble generosity.

This woman didn’t do what she did to make an impression, but she deserves the highest praise. She didn’t worry about what she was going to do without those two coins, how she was going to buy food, or oil to light her home, or any other of her needs. She simply trusted that God would take care of her.

Her sincere gift, without thinking of her own poverty, is held up as an ideal for us. What is it calling us to become? What challenge do we hear in the ringing of two small copper coins? It may include giving money, but the meaning goes far beyond that. The Gospel is about giving and trusting in God. It calls us to live generously and to rely on God. That we are not owners, but *stewards* of all God’s gifts to us: time, talent, treasure.

This widow’s way is difficult, but it leads to a full life. I think this story in its deepest meaning is much like the Eucharist. It is here in the Eucharist that we truly learn about self-giving. It is here that Jesus becomes the gift for us. Here he shows us the most authentic meaning of life—the gift of self, leaving nothing un-given, unshared.

To live is to give; to live is to trust. The great 17th century philosopher Rene Descartes had a proof for existence. He said, “I think, therefore I am.” Perhaps as Christians, we must put it differently: “I *give*, therefore I am. I *trust*, therefore I am.” How will we choose to live the life of this widow this week?