

The most generous people in the world are the poor. They haven't got much but what they have is yours. The rest of us protect what we own and promise we'll become generous whenever we get wealthy.

The widow in this gospel wins high praise from Jesus. She can live with very little, so she gives it all away. When you're not burdened with material things you concentrate on spiritual matters--you give, you open your door, you live charitably. The religious in our church choose poverty. They live without certain material things to devote their lives to Christ. Diocesan priests like me do not take the vow of poverty, but the sisters in our convent, at the Jean Juganne Center, and the brothers at O'Hara and the Community of the Good Shepherd--all of them take the vow of poverty, so they can give themselves to Christ and to us. They imitate this widow.

You might wonder if this widow is the saint Jesus makes her out to be. After all, Jesus is standing outside the temple, right next to the treasury--the temple collection basket--and he inspects what everybody puts in. If Jesus came here today to personally pass the basket, and check what we each put in, I'd empty my wallet too. After this woman puts in her two copper coins, Jesus calls out to his disciples, "Hey, d'ya see that? She put in both coins. Pretty good, huh? Better than all those people." Wouldn't you just want to crawl into a hole? He praises not the value of the gift, but the totality of the gift. The widow only had two copper coins. If you're poor, and you've got two coins, and you want to make an offering, what's the most logical thing you would do? I'd put one coin in the treasury, and keep the other for myself. She didn't. Jesus saw that. She didn't hold back a thing. She models last Sunday's Gospel: you shall love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. All of it.

Too often we hold back. At church we hold back from greeting a stranger, from singing with full voice, from sitting too close. Families hold back from revealing too much, loving too much, giving too much. Students hold back from homework. Amateur athletes hold back from the discipline that could make them great. Our country holds back on immigration policies and from helping poorer nations. And we all hold back from giving to church and charity. We're just asking for a tithe, for 10%; Jesus praises the woman who gives 100%.

The first thing is to know what we're committed to. The second is to give it everything.