

32nd Sunday (B)

8th November 2015

'Giving one's all'

1Kings 17: *the widow made a little scone* Ps 145: *my soul, give praise to the Lord* Heb 9: *Christ offers Himself to take on the faults of many*
Mk 12:38–44: *the poor widow has put in more than all.*

I was in Oxford the other day, and a priest friend I was visiting was organizing an academic seminar in the afternoon, and I asked if I could go along. It was a philosophy seminar, and the room was fairly packed, maybe about 50 students and teachers; and the lady giving the talk, and answering questions afterwards, was — I kid you not! — 96yrs of age. Her voice was a bit cracked, so one had to concentrate, but her mind was razor-sharp. But what struck me was that, at the opening, she mentioned how her father had been an Anglican vicar, how he was sent to the front in the First World War, as a chaplain, and how he had to minister to all those dying soldiers. What she actually said was that her father's job mostly seemed to entail explaining to the dying soldiers that their death — their great sacrifice — did mean something, that they were giving their lives to a good cause. She said that the horror of all that; of the Great War, affected her father greatly,

and that he became a lifelong peace campaigner as a result.

When we see service-men and women giving their lives in conflicts, it can be a sickening reminder of the awfulness of armed conflict. Most of us will never have to experience that at first hand; though many of our countrymen did a century ago in the horrors of the trenches. We remember them, annually, on Remembrance Sunday, those who 'gave their all,' but not by our glorifying war — rather, by acknowledging the suffering that war brings, and the need to find ways continually as the human family to extend justice and defend peace.

In the Gospel, Jesus sees the poor widow giving *her* all — giving her last two small coins, all she had left, into the Treasury of the Temple. It was an expression of her faith, her giving to the maintenance of the Temple sacrifice and ritual. The Lord saw that she was giving in deep faith — her love for the Lord — and not in any way of ostentation or lavish show, as he saw the rich people doing. Her giving — her trustful giving of everything she had — was done to show her love of God, her faith in the Lord's

goodness. And it was done in simplicity of heart, without drawing attention to herself; just humbly and unnoticed. No-one would have noticed; but Jesus noticed, because what is in the heart is what stands out most for Him. He saw the bright light of her faith and generosity of spirit; and this light caught His inner gaze. It stood out for Him; she shone as a beacon of goodness brighter by far than all the lavish donors that day at the Temple. It's what is in the heart that matters. She gave her all to God; and the Son of God saw that and responded with lavish praise. Who would have noticed her action, other than Jesus? Perhaps no-one. And yet she was the one whom Jesus singled out for praise. She was the one whose heart was holy, and was pleasing to God.

Where are we on the spectrum of “giving our all”? Where are our hearts in the range of giving our life entirely to God? How brightly do *our* hearts shine, in the sight of God? Would Jesus single us out for praise, as He gazes on our lives, our actions, our dispositions? What would he see, as He looks at our heart? Would He see a life that is

willing to be spent for others, for giving generously? It is one thing to give one's life in the service of one's country — it's a mixed thing, and sometimes that might not be the right thing, it depends on what one's country is up to! That sacrifice is always brave, and sometimes necessary, but not necessarily good. But to give one's whole life to and for the Lord, is something that could never be wrong. To place one's whole life at the disposal of the Lord. To seek to do His will in everything. To make that sacrifice in perfect trust: here, Lord, this life You gave me: and I give it to You! What more perfect prayer could there be? It reminds me of this prayer (of St Ignatius) that our Headmaster taught us, years ago, at Primary School: an act of perfect resignation of our will to God's:

Prayer of St Ignatius ...

*Teach us, good Lord,
to serve You as You deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do Your will.*