

The Gospel we just heard brings us back to the theme of giving all that we have to the Lord. Now if you remember it was just a few weeks ago that we heard the story of the man who approached Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. And we remember Jesus saying to him: "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor." And at that statement, his face fell, for he had many possessions. And that's the last we hear from the man. Perhaps many of us are little more practical than that, and we'll only give to the Lord what we may think we might have in excess of what we need. But the Lord wants more! The Lord wants all that we have and all that we are. The Lord invites us and He waits for us. Many of us are afraid that if we give all we have, we will have nothing left. We need to trust like the women that we just read about in today's readings.

Let's look again of the widow in the first reading. She had practically nothing and was preparing to share the little she had with her son—and then die. The Prophet Elijah comes and asks her to give to him the small amount she had. And she does so without much thought, or counting the cost. The Gospel story today from Mark is somewhat similar. A poor widow puts two small coins into the treasury, even though she was living in poverty. She then gave what she had without considering how it might bring more hardship upon her.

The two stories we just heard are different in that, in the first story, we hear how the woman was then blessed abundantly by God for her generosity. In the Gospel story, we're not sure what happens to the widow, because the story simply ends with Jesus affirming what she did. But in both stories one thing seems to be clear. Both women definitely acted out of pure generosity and kindness, and neither of them acted because there was something in it for them.

God is also asking us to give Him the little we have. Can we do that? Are we able to trust so much in God that we can give up even what we believe is necessary? First of all, we have to admit that it's really hard to have pure motives. It's difficult to do certain things for others without expecting something in return, that is, without expecting ourselves to benefit in some way. And then sometimes it's impossible to know exactly what our motives are. Our minds play tricks on us at times, and we will believe just about anything, especially when it comes to taking an honest look at ourselves. With all that said, we are still called to be more --- more giving of ourselves and more pure of heart.

I have to admit that this is personally one of my greatest faults. It seems I'm always looking for some kind of reward for the things I do for others. Perhaps it's something as simple as feeling good about myself, or at least being able to lay down my head at night with a clear conscience that I did something positive. But I've also found that these kind of motives are not just in play with one another. They can be part of our relationship with God, too. God asks us to love one another simply because he has loved us first. That should be enough. But many of us decide to act in good, kind, generous ways because we're hoping to secure what God has promised us --- the enormous carrot at the end of the stick --- everlasting life. Sometimes we can even convince ourselves that if we act a certain way, God will owe us. Now it's true that the way we live our lives will likely have some consequences in this life and may influence our life in the next. But living as God asks us to is not a ticket to something we're hoping for at the end of our earthly lives. But rather, acting with a pure heart can be a doorway to a new life, a new way of living, and a more welcoming life to helping and assisting others, which can begin today and then last forever.

Jesus' sacrifice, which is described in our second Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Hebrews, is the perfect example of what it means to love without counting the cost. His selfless act of dying on the cross, and giving His life for us, is what has made our life with God possible. As I said earlier, knowing our true motives is not always easy, but the better we are at learning our motives, the more we will share in the incredible life that God is offering to us. Maybe each time we do something for another person we simply need to ask ourselves a question, "What's in it for me?" And then we need to pray for the grace and purity of heart to be able to sincerely answer in one way only.

"What's in it for me? We should be able to say: We really don't care."