

## 32Sundayb.06

1. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, a four week retreat program, Ignatius of Loyola advises the retreatants to use their imaginations when they pray about a scene that can be imagined. And that is true of most of the Gospel material. Unlike Paul's Letters the Gospels give us concrete scenes made up of a place, sometimes even a time of day, and always a cast of characters. Let us follow his advice by trying to imagine today's Gospel. I will describe the Gospel and you will try to see it as if it were happening before your very eyes. It may help you to close your eyes so that you can imagine the scene more easily.

2. The place is the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus and some of his disciples are there, surrounded by a large crowd of people, some of them members of the educated class called scribes. You can identify them by their long robes and by the fact that other people greet them very respectfully. Jesus is seated next to the treasury, that is, the area where people deposit their money for the upkeep of the temple and the temple sacrifices. There are large receptacles there to receive the money, and the money, since it is coins and not paper money or checks, makes a noise when it is deposited, and

you can tell the difference between the noise a large, more valuable coin makes and the noise little coins of less value make.

3. Jesus watches the people putting in their money, and he too can hear the difference between big and small coins being dropped into the receptacles. He sees many rich people, many of them scribes, and hears the big sound their coins make. They are giving generously. Then he sees a woman approaching. From her dress she appears to be poor. She is an older woman. There is no one with her. So she is probably a widow. She fumbles in the folds of her outer garment and produces two small coins, drops them into the receptacle and moves away quickly, embarrassed by the little sound they make.

4. Jesus watches her disappear into the crowd. Then he turns to his disciples and says: That poor widow put more in than all the others because they gave what they didn't need but she gave even what she needed for herself to live.

5. Now Ignatius would ask you to reflect on this scene that you have imagined and draw some fruit for yourself. What does it mean, and what does it mean for me personally? Is my relationship with God, with Jesus, like that poor widow's? Is it marked by

generosity, and by that we don't mean how much we put in the collection but rather how many areas of our lives, how much of our lives do we entrust to God and let Him guide us in them? Where are we renegeing, where are we holding back? This is a life time work—to give oneself entirely to God—and we have to work at it slowly, gradually, daily. It is what we talked about last week when we read the Gospel about the two great commandments, the first of which tells us that we must love God with all our minds, all our heart, all our strength. A tall order! But if we don't keep the goal before our eyes, we will never move closer to it but will remain aimless, scattered in our minds and hearts all the days of our lives. We will suffer a kind of spiritual schizophrenia, a spiritual dementia in which we will wander without direction in our lives. No, let us, insofar as we can, put all our money on the Lord and live out of that concentration each day a little more and more.

6. We won't do it now, but we could imagine the first reading for today as well. There too there is a widow, and the prophet Elijah asks her to give him water and a little bit of bread. She tells him she has just enough flour and oil left to prepare a final meal for herself and her son. But Elijah tells her to that if she gives him what she prepares she will have enough for herself and her son as well. And he quotes SS to her: "For the Lord, the God of Israel,

says, ‘The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’” She believed him and her flour and oil did not run out for a year. So let us believe the Lord’s promise and be generous with him in all the decisions of our lives. We will not outdo the divine goodness and generosity.