



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Sunday XXXII (7th November) 2021

If someone were to sit down and budget for her or his life's necessities for the year ahead, I wonder what would be included - what that person considered necessary elements of life.

My suspicion is that, for many, the concept of necessity would actually be something less than that without which life would not be possible. It is easy to criticise such an approach, but, in fact, it is not quite so simple. There is also the consideration of what we might term the factor of making life worth living - those aspects of our routines, which offset the hassles and pressures of our days.

The value of those necessary rewards is often judged in relation to the rewards enjoyed by others: we feel that we are adequately compensated for the grind when our standard of living matches those with whom we consider to be statistically equivalent to ourselves.

Over the years, I have come to suppose that it is in this light that we should view the actions of the widow in the Gospel reading this morning. It is hard to think that Jesus would celebrate an old woman going home to starve, having surrendered her last coppers to the Temple treasury. Instead, she sacrificed the money, which could have enhanced her quality of life.

It might appear that this rather qualifies the virtue of what she did, but this is not necessarily the case. We would not be talking here about someone who fished around in her pocket for a few coins, which might easily have been lost and unmissed. The money would have been ear-marked for something; and, given that we are led to infer that she was not a rich person, something far from frivolously extravagant.

It is possible to discern from the story that the widow found enhancement of life in generosity of spirit. This lays down quite a challenge to the era, in which emerged the concept - and practice - of *retail therapy*: seeking comfort in the mere act of spending money: often on things for which we shall have little use.

Yet, finding fulfilment in the well-being of others rather than in the accumulation of our own rewards, surely, sits at the heart of a life of discipleship, gathering, as we do, around the image of One, Who surrendered His Life for the good of others.

This involves more than simply enduring the loss of something we rather wanted. Instead, it entails a change of perspective that permits us to find enhancement of our lives, no longer in the indulgence of self, but in the increased flourishing of others.

It is this centrifugal search for fulfilment, which characterises the society of the Kingdom of Heaven; and in developing its ethos in ourselves, we edge towards the realisation of our daily prayer that God's Kingdom may come on earth as it is in Heaven.

This is the key to understanding the greatness of the widow's action. In worldly terms, her donation was a drop in the ocean compared to the doubtless munificent contributions made by richer people; but from the eternal point-of-view, hers was the greater deed, because it represented a triumph of Grace over self-interest: or, perhaps more accurately, an alignment of Grace and self interest - a revelation of God's Purpose at work in the world.