

From Our Surplus or Our All

Intro. This could be the weekend to talk about tithing and financial stewardship. To talk about whether we give God the *first part* of our abundance rather than from what is *left over* after bills and bubble gum. The image of a red carpet came to mind. Before awards are given out in theater and film, we see a procession of people who walk the red carpet and pose for comments and pictures of their evening wear. In their version, some scribes seemed to find a way to wrangle an invitation to the best parties and dinners wearing their fanciest robes.

I. When I first read this gospel, I thought they were two different stories; two different teachings by the Lord and I could choose one or the other to talk about. As the week went on, I realized, not so. It is the *same* story that offers a *contrast* between

different “religious persons” [Sacra Pagina]. Last week we read about a scribe who was sincere, wanting to know what the most important commandment was. So we know not all scribes were bad or dishonest. (Something we might keep in mind before making sweeping judgements about any group of people.) Today, the Lord talked about other scribes *not sincere* about their religious practice. Scribes were trained in reading and writing and to know the Law of God. They also handled legal matters after someone died. The scribes the Lord was criticizing had apparently lost touch with their true purpose of serving *others* and began to serve *themselves*, or in some cases, **helping themselves** to the inheritances of widows. This was not religious behavior. Some was simple arrogance but some obvious criminal behavior. In contrast, the woman

who lost her husband and possibly her home because she had no rights to inheritance, was not respected in the culture of the day, yet she gave to God *only* two small coins, but she exhibited a *generosity that is at the heart of holiness*. It's not *how much* is given; it's *how* it's given. Unlike the scribes who trusted in themselves, she along with the widow in the first reading put faith and trust in God. They were the **true** religious people.

Concl. When have we been the recipient of someone's "reckless generosity?" I mean completely unexpected, bowl-us-over generosity. It's awesome when that happens! How about the reverse: when have *we* been recklessly generous to someone *else*? Even a stranger? It can be scary, but also an exhilarating experience.

No commentary I read thought the point of the gospel was to downplay people who have much nor to say we should be *purposely poor* – unless we **choose** a hermit's life. Maybe the teaching encourages us to be reckless in our generosity not only to God, but to one another and find the true holiness the Lord admired in the women. We don't need a red carpet in front of the church. We just need a generous heart with one another and **God will be honored.**

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