

Thirty-second Sunday Per Annum (B)
November 8, 2015.

Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For...she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living (Mk. 12:43-44).

In drawing his disciples' attention as well as our own to the offering and example of the poor widow, our Lord draws our attention to a *nobody* by the standards of the world; a poor widow in a time when widowhood was often synonymous with destitution. By comparison, some have observed that we live in a *celebrity culture* in which real life; our own life is viewed next to the lives of celebrities and judged to be inadequate and inauthentic. Chiefly through the medium of television celebrities are portrayed as idealized forms of ourselves. Ironically, it is we who are never fully real in a celebrity culture; a culture in which style is often chosen over substance.

Consequently, whether it be a make-over show or a so-called reality program, the cult of the self dominates our cultural landscape. The highest achievements in a celebrity of culture are wealth, sexual conquest and above all, fame. It does not matter how these are obtained. What matters is becoming known. In its extreme expression we become real to ourselves by being seen by others and so there is an incessant perceived need to connect with others; to let them know what we are doing, where we are, what we are thinking. Ironically, in our efforts to be known by others, we isolate ourselves from those who are closest to us. Electronic devices now allow us to project ourselves into cyber space, though all too often we become morally absent to those around us.

The widow spoken of in the Gospel and immortalised by our Lord's admonition to his disciples, is more than an example of generosity. Her wholehearted gift has inspired the generosity of rich and poor alike throughout the ages. The widow's offering, her wholehearted gift, *all she had to live on*, speaks of the validity and necessity of lives of total self-giving and vocations to absolute devotion, no matter the state – married or single. These are the ideals of the Christian life lived by our Lord's disciples in lives often belittled by a celebrity culture.

Increasingly we find ourselves at odds with the greater culture and though numerically the number of those who identify themselves as Christian is still substantial, the actual number is, in reality, quite small. In 1974, the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, the American Archbishop who used the medium of television to evangelize all of North America observed: *The world in which we live is the battleground of the Church. I believe that we are now living at the end of Christendom. It is the end of Christendom, but not the end of Christianity. What is Christendom? Christendom is the political, economic, moral, social, legal life of a nation as inspired by the gospel ethic. That is finished. Abortion, the breakdown of family life, dishonesty, even the natural virtues upon which the supernatural virtues were based, are being discredited. Christianity is not at the end. But we are at the end of Christendom. And I believe that the sooner we wake up to this fact, the sooner we will be able to solve many of our problems* (*Through the Year with Fulton Sheen*, p. 27). This is a frank assessment of the state of things in our own country also and in many other areas of life we are equally at odds with both the greater culture and stated government policies. For example, half of the cabinet ministers in our new federal government did not swear in with a religious oath.

What will become of us? *My kingdom is not of this world* (Jn. 18:36). When our Lord spoke these words to Pontius Pilate it may be said that He established a principle by which we, His disciples, are to govern our own lives; *for here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come* (Heb. 13:14). We must do all that we can to live our lives by the gospel ethic and our efforts to do so will become increasingly demanding, if not heroic. Increasingly we will find that the institutional structures once inspired and guided by the gospel ethic will be mere shells; perhaps even a danger to the authentic faith. So we must commit ourselves to building up the family which is the domestic church and do all that we can to make our parish authentically Catholic; a place in which the truth of Christ is proclaimed in all its fullness for God's greater glory and the salvation of souls. This, in essence, is the purpose of the Family of Faith Campaign and the Cardinal's Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese: a collective effort and witness to the truth and charity of Christ in our culture. Together, *speaking the truth in love* (Eph. 4:15) we will provide our neighbours and even our enemies, with the one thing without which all other things are empty – the truth. This is the greatest service that we can provide, *holding to the word of Christ* (Phil. 2:15).

In a scale never before seen in human history, many are *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles* (Eph. 4:14); and the casualties are legion. The most charitable thing we can do is first, to renew our own *personal* commitment to the Gospel of Christ our Saviour and then through the discipline of prayer and the works of faith to proclaim this truth by the witness of a holy life. The Gospel ethic that transforms lives and cultures is here on the Altar in the Sacrament of Christ's Passion. In this Sacrament He gives each one of us all that He had to live on – His very life; and in drawing our attention to the poor widow, our Lord invites us to see in her an image of Himself who for our salvation, pours Himself into the Treasury of the Father's Temple. This Mystery of Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis*) is what we Christians are to model our lives on; not the cult of celebrity, not the pursuit of an illusion. Vain illusions are nothing new but never in human history have they been so effectively and so pervasively propagated. The cult of the self may dominate our cultural landscape but the poor and humble Christ can in fact help us to rise above all these illusions and live lives of meaning, purpose and value. So we must endeavour all the more to be faithful to the truth and to become one with our Lord in His saving work. Our fidelity to the Sacrament of the Lord's Passion will ensure that we will not be led astray and that self-giving love will be the measure of our own lives.