

**THIS POOR WIDOW HAS PUT IN MORE THAN ALL THOSE WHO ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE OFFERING BOX. – Biblical Commentary Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Mark 12,28-44**

*And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."*

*And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

In the temple of Jerusalem, after he had attacked the doctrine of the scribes - the scribes were the official theologians, the infallible magistrates of the Jewish religious institution - after he had attacked their doctrine, Jesus attacks their conduct. It is what the evangelist mark writes in chapter 12, 38-44

Let's see. "*And in his teaching he said,*" Jesus is teaching to the crowd. This is important; it is a teaching that is always valid for the community of believers. That which follows is not so much a controversy against the Jewish world from which the community of believers had already separated, but a warning - unfortunately unheeded - because within the Christian community the same perverse attitudes that Jesus denounces are not born.

*"And in his teaching he said, "Beware..."* Beware means to be alert, be on guard. It is strange; Jesus had never asked us to beware of sinners, unbelievers, but always the religious people. These are the dangerous ones for the people's faith.

And who is it that Jesus warns us against? The scribes. Their words were considered to have the same value as God's words, the major religious authority. So Jesus says: "*Beware of the these types, these*

*individuals.*” Then Jesus offers three signs to recognize them, so that they will always remain valid for the community.

The first: “*.. like to walk around in long robes..*” They are people that have nothing. They are empty inside, but they hide their emptiness with decorations, clothes, religious vestments that cover their nullity.

Jesus adds “*...like greetings in the marketplaces..*” Meaning to be flattered, revered, to be recognized for their religious status, “*...and have the best seats in the synagogues.*” In the synagogue, the first benches were those farthest from the people, and were up high, a position of control from which to dominate the people with their doctrine. And when it’s time to be with the people they stand apart, they are distant and on high, but when it is time to eat they are in the best seats, actually “*.. the places of honor at feasts,*” Jesus says that those nearest the master of the house are served first with better food.

And now the accusation, “*...who devour,*” they strip and empty “*... widows' houses...*” A widow means someone without a man to protect them, needy people. Instead of communicating life to the needy, they take everything, therefore communicate death.

Be careful of these people that, even if they appear with all their distinct, religious garments, seeming to indicate a nearness to God, the God of life, they are actually the agents of death. And the only time that Jesus condemns someone he does it with this religious authority. He continues: “*They will receive the greater condemnation.*”

What is the condemnation? That Jesus will take away the vine that God had entrusted to them, meaning he will take away the people from their clutches, from their greed. And the evangelist presents us with a Jesus that explains that which he has anticipated verbally. “*.. he sat down opposite the treasury..*,” which is the real God of the temple, the place where the offers were taken, the real God adored by the scribes, “*...and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums.*”

The rich support an institution that does not denounce the injustice of wealth, but actually supports it. So the rich maintain the system. “*And a poor widow came...*” to understand what is to come we must understand that, according to the second book of Deuteronomy chapter 14, 28, where we read that the proceeds of the temple must be to maintain the widows and orphans, the people with the most need.

Here we now see that the opposite happens, it was the scribes that, in their greed, made even the widows maintain the temple, this bloodsucking that is the temple's treasure, claimed as the place of God's presence.

“*And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him..*” Jesus always has to call his disciples because they are distant. Not the physical distance, more the spiritual. “*..said to them, “Truly, I say to you,...”*” earlier, the evangelist had spoken of teaching, now he puts the word “truly”; therefore they are the teachings that are valid for always even in the Christian community.

Jesus does not praise the widow, but weeps for this victim of the religious institution, of the greed, of the cupidity of the religious authority, that exploits the people for its own interests. They certainly don't let it be seen, they are cunning, all seems done for the glory of God, but it is really done only for their own interests.

*"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

The woman, the widow, is the image of the people exploited in the name of God. Therefore it is not a praise, but a lament. This is not in the liturgical passage, but it is necessary to read on to complete it. (Mark 13,1) Then one of the disciples of Jesus draws the attention on the magnificence of the temple and said: "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And here is Jesus' sentence: "An institution that exploits the poor for its own interests, an institution that instead of communicating life, takes it away, has no right to exist."

Here are Jesus' words *"There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."*