

5. June 2021

“A good example and a bad example”

Mk 12:38-44

In his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets; these are the men who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.' He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

When we listen attentively to the sermons of Jesus in the Gospels, we often encounter very clear language.

Nowadays, however, the preaching is often "insipid" and lacks that "salt". It is believed that you have to adapt to the mentality of the people and that you cannot say anything that might challenge them. In the sermons there is hardly a call for conversion and a change of life, and not infrequently they are human reflections on life in general.

Jesus' words, clear as they were, did not deter people. On the contrary, we know that *“the great crowd listened to Him with delight” (Mk 12:37b)*. This delight in listening to Him came from the truth He preached to them. One is pleased to hear the truth in a preaching, and the invitation to conversion is also accepted.

In today's Gospel, Jesus presents us with two opposing examples: a good example and a bad example. On the one hand, there are the scribes, who were often the object of the Lord's criticism. Above all, He reproached them for abusing the religious and social position they enjoyed among the people, whom they often misled. Unfortunately, they abused their religious position for their own interests, thus deceiving God, themselves and others. Through the gospels, we learn about the wickedness of some of them, who dared to persecute Jesus and use everything against Him.

As an antithesis, Jesus gives us the example of the widow. A woman in secret... Widows could have a difficult life in the Israel of that time. They did not enjoy a privileged position among the people, and those who did had a privileged position did not take advantage of it to help these women. On the contrary. However, in the example that Jesus points out to us, we find a soul full of love, totally devoted to God.

What a contrast Jesus makes us see with these examples! Those who were called to be witnesses and models for the people, abused their position and deprived women like that widow, who were already poor enough, of their possessions.

This widow, who was poor and gave everything, gives away the last of her possessions; and Jesus takes her as a model for all times. To this day, her example influences us.

But Jesus does not simply want to tell us a story, but warns us and instructs us. God is severe with those who act against Him and against people! For those *“who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive”*, the Lord says.

Such words of Jesus are always an exhortation to examine our own lives. Where do we still have the attitude of those scribes? It does not have to be as drastic as in the cases Jesus shows us. But we can make a very subtle examination of conscience, and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to know our hearts better, to discover the “scribe” that may still exist in us and to overcome it.

The widow's example, on the other hand, is a challenge of love. We can never love enough and we can always grow in love. The widow's example challenges us! She gave everything, and not of what she had in overabundance - she gave everything she had!

We can ask ourselves: do we give everything, or only something of ourselves? Do we give ourselves, or do we set limits?

It is also part of Jesus' proclamation to show us the bad examples, to warn us and show us the consequences; just as, on the other hand, He highlights the good examples to invite us to do good and to let ourselves be attracted by the inner beauty of truth.