

## **November 8, 2015 Poor Widow Homily**

Brothers and sisters, some of you may be of an age to remember a celebrated talk show host from years gone by. His name is Merv Griffin, and for many years he hosted an afternoon variety show in the 60's and 70's. One of the memorable guests who turned up on his show was the legendary basketball player, Bill Russell. An African-American and now member of the Basketball Hall of Fame he displayed great talent on the court and played on many championship teams for the Boston Celtics.

Having grown up in a large city ghetto, Bill Russell was not immune to the challenges facing any young person who wishes to make something of his life. In their lively conversation, Merv Griffin made reference to his childhood poverty. Mr. Russell became quite animated and voiced an objection to the host's characterization. "But we were not poor", he said. "It is true that that we had very few possessions and little money in the bank. Material comforts were scarce, but we were rich in the things that truly matter, namely, our Christian faith, our strong family ties and the network of friends in our largely black community." In truth, the Russell family found their treasure in the Lord, not in earthly possessions. Serving Christ was at the very heart of their daily existence.

It is significant that in today's gospel reading we are introduced to a "poor widow"(Mk.12:42). In biblical times, the widow was symbol of all those who were unprotected and defenseless. Since there was no social service network or welfare system, widows had to rely on their children or on charity for material support. Not surprisingly, the prophets of the Old Testament often scolded the chosen people for their failure to respond to the needs of widows and orphans.

In the gospel, the widow appears in the Court of the Women in the Jerusalem Temple. In the first century, the temple functioned as a bank or treasury. In one of the temple courts, the Court of the Women, there were thirteen trumpet shaped collection boxes (or receptacles) for donations. The money collected would be used, in part, for the upkeep of the temple. The evangelist St. Mark, informs us that the woman "came and put in two small coins worth a few cents" (Mk.12:42). Her generosity reminds us of the first of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor of spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of god" (Mt.5:3). Like Bill Russell, her treasure was not in wealth or earthly possessions but in the Lord Himself.

In a recent study of the Pew forum polling organization, we learn that an extraordinarily high twenty-eight percent of Americans identify themselves as "Nones", that is, Americans without any religious affiliation whatsoever. In our affluent society, very few Americans see the value of religious faith and practice. However, that very same organization shares some encouraging data about one sector of society. According to their findings, Poor, black women in the Southern part of the United States, were the one class of Americans who were deeply committed to their Christian faith and were most content with their lot in life. They found the "hidden treasure" in the person of Jesus Christ.

Noteworthy, too in our gospel is that the poor widow "has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood"(Mk.12:44). The Greek word translated livelihood is also the word for life. In giving her whole livelihood, the widow gives her life... entrusting herself to God. This remarkable woman surrendered herself to God. In doing so, she anticipates the mystery of Christ's sacrificial offering of himself on the cross!

Let each of us ask: What does the example of this woman mean to me? And what are the lessons of this incident for me?

Amen!