

1. An experienced climber loses his footing, falls but catches a branch. He yells: Is there anyone up there who can help me? Yes. Who are you? I am the Lord. Wonderful; Lord, can you help me? Yes, just do as I say. I'll do anything Lord. Good. Let go.....Then he yells out: Is there anybody else up there who can help me?

We may laugh a little at this story. But we seldom laugh when we find ourselves clinging to something or someone and hear our friends, our counselors, or life itself challenging us to let go.

We instinctively know that letting go will enter us into the realm of the unknown, where we lose our sense of security.

So, when we do let go, we often feel as though we are losing control of our own destiny. But the Gospel today is telling us that it is when we realize that the way of Jesus is the only real source of security where we will find the happiness, the peace and the safety that we all long for. It is not money or property or university degrees or professional status or health that really matter because all these can disappear without warning. What really matters is that people take care of each other, as Jesus has taken care of us.

There is conflict here: the reason that it is so difficult for us to give up control is because growing up means taking more control of our lives and so letting go means giving up the control that we've fought so hard to attain.

But what matters is not what we have or what we can get; not what we can do or what people think of us. What matters is that I be fully, freely, truly my real self before God and

before one another. After all, we were not put on this earth to put on masks in order to fool people about who I really am.

Eventually a serious question that we each must ask ourselves is: on what or on whom is my trust built? And what does it mean to have absolute trust, unshakeable resolve and firm faith in Jesus Christ?

2. On a natural plane, trust is difficult to come by because we have often had our trust betrayed.

It's certainly not an easy task to know who to trust. If we could only see as God sees, there would be no need for dating services or airport security screeners or Better Business Bureaus.

Actually, we have a number of sayings about trust that some may think come from the Bible, but in reality, they originate from our own human wisdom:

Never judge a book by its cover.  
Don't be fooled by appearances.  
Beauty is only skin deep.

Last Sunday, Jesus praised the intentions of the scribe who questioned him about the greatest commandment, but in today's scripture, Jesus shows his contempt for those scribes who claim to be close to God, but who are really far from the kingdom.

3. He condemns the way they stroked their own egos while placing heavy burdens on ordinary, working people.

And so in today's gospel, as if to illustrate a point in the opposite direction of the corrupt scribes, Jesus called the disciples' attention

to a poor widow throwing her 2 small coins into the offering chest of the Temple.

By all appearances, the widow's gift was insignificant, especially when compared to the large offerings donated by the rich, such as the scribes and Pharisees.

But apparently, God uses a different method of accounting than we do.

Money and position, power and influence are demanding masters. We acquire more things only to discover that those very things have acquired us. I recall my Mother saying that the happiest time in her life was during the depression; my parents had little money, but with everyone they knew being in the same boat, they all shared their limited resources with those around them who were in greater need.

The point of today's gospel is that God does not judge a book by its cover; he isn't fooled by appearances and he recognizes that beauty is only skin deep.

Rather, God looks into the heart, counts the change left in our pockets and checkbooks and rejoices with the angels of heaven when we finally learn how to give, sacrificially from a heart consumed by love. After all Jesus gave everything he had, sparing nothing, not even his very life while hanging on the cross for us.

And so, real biblical giving must be sacrificial.

The amount of the gift never matters as much as its cost to the giver. To this end, there is a Spanish proverb that says: there are no pockets in burial shrouds.

Still, it's not about the size of the gift; it's about the sacrifice involved.

Again, we're not only talking about money; the sacrifice can be @ helping those in need, or @ forgiveness of those who have deeply hurt us and so forth.

I have to say that sacrificial giving has a certain recklessness to it; but there is a great symbolic truth here, because Jesus lived recklessly.

As Christians, we are continuously being challenged to enter Jesus' world of upside down values.

Mother Teresa was fond of saying that God does not expect great deeds from us. God only wants small deeds done with great love—truthfully we all have such opportunities that occur daily in our lives. And so the question before us is: do we do those tasks with great love or do we withhold our love while doing them?

Think of all the opportunities that each day brings us along with the chance to do them with love.

I would suggest that the behavior of the widows mentioned in the Old Testament reading as well as the more familiar story of the widow who gave the 2 small coins in the Temple revealed a faith that defined their lives; we must recognize that these women had a prayer-filled relationship with God.

Too often, we wrongly think that faith is something God gives us from time to time, but actually, faith is a reality that God creates within us from the beginning of our conscious lives. A faith that only comes after we enter into a prayerful relationship with God.

God did not give these two widows faith in order for them to be generous. Rather, God created them as human beings with faith, human beings who chose to live out their faith by caring for a prophet and giving generously to God's kingdom.

Simple faith is nothing more or less than living out the faith that God has placed within us.

And so faith and trust go together like hydrogen and oxygen. Simple faith mixed with a God-focused trust creates a world of wonder and possibilities.

Ultimately, sacrificial giving is about love; a love that begins in childhood as children come to realize that they too can please Jesus by giving of their time, their talent and their treasure in order to make our world a better place in which to live. And so to remind us all that stewardship giving begins at childhood, we have put a basket in the gathering space filled with stewardship coins; these coins are also for the children, when they do offer to assist their parents with the chores at home or help someone with their homework or donate an offering from their allowance, then they too are invited to put their stewardship coin into the collection.

We all have to realize that we have not been put on earth to withhold our love from God and those in need-- just the opposite.

I find it both curious and empowering to imagine what God would do in our lives if we would, like these women, just let go of what we believe we must have in order to live and thereby discover what only God can give.

It is our spiritual tragedy that there is so often some part of our lives, some part of our activities, some part of ourselves that we withhold from Christ.

It is difficult to simply let go of the branch when left hanging, but at some point in our journeys, it is necessary. If we trust everyone except God, where does that leave us?

The faith God calls from us, a faith with uncommon trust, is to believe that God loves the whole world and that too is to be our calling.

Confusing? Challenging? Then perhaps we should simply listen to St. Augustine when he said: love God and then do what you will...