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VATICAN - AVE MARIA by Rev. Luciano Alimandi, "Mary, Mother of our self-giving"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "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" (Mk 12, 43-44). This passage taken from Mark's Gospel, read on the 32nd Sunday of the Year, Year B, reminds us of a central truth in our faith: total self-giving to God. A truth of vital importance: how in fact could we truly believe in Him unless we belong to Him? If we offer only the superfluous to God, would faith in Him be possible?

Jesus offers the figure of a poor widow, whose name is not even mentioned, as an example of authentic giving; instead of putting the superfluous into the treasury, like others, she put "everything she possessed, all she had to live on". Her gesture was not glaring, but the Lord sees in the heart and recognises the most beautiful reality of the faith: total gift of self, or, the most perfect imitation of Divine life. God does not give superfluously he gives all, as the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, recalled at the beginning of his pontificate: "He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ - and you will find true life." (Benedict XVI, homily 24 April 2005).

If this woman shows what it means to have complete trust in God, how much more the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of all authentic donation, helps us make our whole life a gift of self to Jesus. Mary was the first to offer her self to the Redeemer, holding nothing back, giving herself, aware of the disproportion between what was given and what was received: "Blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". Giving Christ our poverty as creatures enables us to accept the gift of the Creator, the magnificence of His love, always at work to transform us.

Giving of self always transforms. The Saints are perfect examples of this reality. The more we trust the Lord and give ourselves to Him, the more we are transformed in Him. The problem is human selfishness, the inability to see further than "two coins"; which prevents us from changing, putting our talents to good use, abandoning ourselves in God as a child throws itself into the protecting arms of its father! How often today Jesus calls "the rich young man", too concerned about himself to decide to follow Him. With Mary we can sing the Magnificat, on the condition that we put all our trust in God. When we give ourselves to Him we too are immersed in the ocean of His loving mercy: "His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.". Those who fear God, like the poor widow, attract Christ's loving gaze and praise. The Gospel is full of these icons of unconditioned love, lovers of "Love unloved".

From every Marian shrine, from every corner of the earth where she is venerated and invoked, Our Lady continues to sing her Magnificat, to testify that her Son continues to "fill the hungry with good things; and send empty away the rich in themselves". A person who gives everything is a loser in the eyes of the world, but a winner in the eyes of God and rich in boundless love. One who thinks he gives much, but holds back himself, gives only the superfluous; one who mistakes appearance for substance, instead of growing rich becomes ever poorer, also in faith.

This helps to understand why Jesus continually urges his disciples to pray and make sure their hearts are filled not with appearance but with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Entrusting one's self to God is like true friendship for those we love: we open our heart not just once, but again and again; a life of self-giving to God is a continual opening to others, a daily outpouring of self, drop by drop, a sweet letting-go to God, slipping into the ocean of his goodness. It would be absurd for a drop of water to imagine it could be the sea, unless it falls and loses itself therein! (Agenzia Fides 15/11/2006 - righe 46, parole 740)

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