

As I read over our Gospel reading for today, the story traditionally referred to as the widow's mite, my mind went back to a salutary experience I had shortly after I took over the Parish of Finglas in 1980. On the previous day, I had made the annual appeal in Church for Christmas donations to the Parish Poor Fund. This gave the Rector discretionary funds to enable him to respond to cases of need.

The following day a man appeared at my door in a rather shabby coat. He said that his wife had come home from Church and told him about the Parish Poor Fund. He went on to explain that, since his sight and hearing were poor, he was rarely in Church and as he could not work he and his wife were not well off. As he spoke I began to work out in my own mind an appropriate Christmas payment. He then explained that he backed the odd horse and probably lost more often than he won. I rapidly readjusted my thinking as to how I could gently explain that the Parish Poor Fund was not there to offset losses on the horses. But before I could do so he handed me an envelope - it was his Christmas Disability Bonus (in those days about £30). He and his wife had decided that I would know of someone who could use that money more than they could.

This has stood out in my mind ever since as an example of sacrificial giving. The real personal sacrifice made by that lovely couple made me careful about how I distributed that gift.

On this particular Sunday there is the theme of Remembrance, remembering those who died in the conflicts of the last century, of those from this State who have died on peace keeping duties in the service of the United Nations. Of course every Sunday has its overtones of remembrance, as in Word and Sacrament, as we join in the Creeds of the Church, we remember the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thinking over this, with thoughts of that disability payment handed over to me, my thoughts turned to the question of how do we, as individuals, as a community, respond to the sacrifice of others.

How we choose to respond says a lot about what value we place on that sacrifice, to what extent I have allowed that sacrifice to challenge my own attitudes.

Now there are sacrifices that we are all obliged to make. Our incomes, the items we purchase are all subject to tax. We feel aggrieved if we feel that the Government are misusing the money we have sacrificed in our taxes. We make our own voluntary contributions to charities. If we feel that that money is not well spent, that our sacrifice has not been valued, we can choose to withdraw our support. In short we have expectations as to how any sacrifice we make is to be valued.

So much for the responses we expect; what about the responses we make, as

individuals, as communities. How do we respond to the person who makes a sacrifice, who puts themselves out in service, who turns the other cheek, who goes the second mile? Such sacrifice is essentially self giving. Do we simply take advantage of the sacrifice, see it as somehow or other our due, what we have a right to expect of the other – or do we see it for what it is as gift, a giving of the self. This applies at all levels – in response to what is done for us in the home, what parents do for children, what children do for parents; in the context of the Church – do we value what individual do for us on our behalf, in arranging the flowers, in Sunday School, in music, in what is offered in keeping the grounds, in those who offer their service in running the business of the Parish – do we value it, do we honour it as gift as gift; in the context of Remembrance, do the values and priorities we have as a society, the value we put on issues of justice, of peace making, of reconciliation, the value we place on our freedom do honour to the sacrifice that was made by those we remember today.

The Christian response to sacrifice must always demonstrate something of the kenotic, self, emptying, self forgetting love of Christ. As we are reminded in the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of John, ‘We love because he first loved us.’ We are talking here of life lived in response to Christ, of attitudes, values, relationships being lived in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ. I find myself returning to Paul’s exhortation to the Church at Philippi:

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup>he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death –  
even death on a cross.

*Philippians 2.5-8*

I began by talking of that man coming to me with his Christmas disability bonus. It was not the largest donation I had to the fund that year – and yet it was the largest, because like the widow in the Gospel reading it represented real sacrifice.

That widow's offering was seen as of little or no significance by most of those who watched her put in her few spare coins but Jesus saw beyond the amount to see the value of the gift. This all set me thinking about how do we respond to sacrifice, to self giving in the service of us or of others. It set me asking myself what value do we place on the sacrifice, the self giving of others; what value do we place upon the person who is prepared to turn the other cheek, to go the second mile, who is prepared to give of themselves? What difference does this make to me, to my attitudes and priorities, to the way I relate to the other?

What is on our mind as we say the post communion prayer:

‘May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;  
we who drink his cup bring life to others;

we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world ..’

and as we say the subsequent prayer:

‘Through him we offer you our souls and bodies  
to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work to your praise and glory.

May all this awaken in us something of the self giving self emptying love of  
Christ, that we may show something of him in the world in which we live.