



**Meditation/Reflection to observe  
2016 WORLD DAY OF CLOISTERED LIFE  
—Pro Orantibus Day (“For Those Who Pray”)—**

***A Matter of Sacrifice***

**Gospel Reading:** Lk 21:1-4

When Jesus looked up He saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and He noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, “I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.”

**Reflection:**

King Solomon constructed the first Jewish temple nearly 1,000 years before the birth of Christ. The Babylonians destroyed it 400 years later, when the Israelites were sent into exile. Upon their return, the remnant of Israel rebuilt the temple and dedicated it in 515 B.C. Enlarged and adorned by King Herod, this was the temple where Jesus spent so much of His time while in Jerusalem.

Only the Jewish priests entered the Temple itself. However, the building was surrounded by a series of courtyards and porticos, where people went to pray. Jesus frequently prayed there and taught the crowds who had gathered. In the episode described in Luke 21:1-4, Our Lord was sitting in one of the outer courtyards of the Temple when He taught the lesson that appears in today’s Gospel.

Jesus’ teaching was occasioned by the contrast among those making financial offerings at the Temple, one of whom was a poor widow. On her visit to the temple, this poor woman made what appeared to be a routine gift. She went to the place where tithes were collected and deposited her contribution.

According to Biblical scholars, the outer wall of the Temple treasury was fitted with large trumpet-shaped receptacles into which people could place their offerings. The coins would rattle around in the horn at the top, and fall through an opening into a secure strongbox. It was not unlike a night deposit box at a modern bank, although noisier.

Those making large offerings of coins—remember, there was no paper money at the time—could draw attention to themselves, if they wanted to, by the noisy echo of their coins clacking down the treasury trumpet. By contrast, the small offering of the widow wouldn’t have been noticed by anyone. It is this contrast to which the Lord draws our attention.



On the one hand, there are those who use their religious practice as a means of drawing attention to themselves. In itself, this does not negate the value of the act itself, but it diminishes the merit that one derives from it. On the other hand, there are those, like this poor widow, for whom public acts of piety are a sincere expression of their deep faith and trust in God.

Cloistered religious embody lives “hidden with Christ.” Within their convent and monastery walls they offer prayers and sacrifices that go unnoticed to most of the world.

Like the widow of the Gospel, these dedicated religious embrace of life of enclosure and thus perform hidden acts of piety for the sake of others who for whatever reason cannot or choose not to do so. By their lives of silence, solitude and sacrifice they obtain the graces needed for countless souls to experience the merciful love of God in ways we can only imagine!



In Our Lord’s revelations to Saint Faustina, Jesus speaks of “chosen souls” who are invited to share in His mission of mercy. Our Merciful Savior states that these special souls “fill my Heart with joy. They bear My features; therefore the Heavenly Father looks upon them with special pleasure....Their number is small. They are a defense for the world before the justice of the Heavenly Father and a means of obtaining mercy for the world. The love and sacrifice of these souls sustain the world in existence” (*Diary*, 367).

In his recent Apostolic Constitution, *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, Pope Francis reflects upon the vital importance of cloistered contemplatives in the life and mission of the Church. He notes that the contemplative monastic life “is rooted in the silence of the cloister; it produces a rich harvest of grace and mercy.” The Holy Father also reminds those who embrace such a sublime calling that “the Church greatly esteems your life of complete self-giving” and “counts on your prayers and your self-sacrifice to bring today’s men and women to the good news of the Gospel.”



As we celebrate WORLD DAY OF CLOISTERED LIFE, let us remember these contemplative religious who in convents, monasteries and hermitages give of themselves selflessly to God in hidden sacrifice and in silent work. Let us always assist these dedicated souls by our spiritual and material support—in whatever way we can—even if it is like the poor widow who offers two small coins.

We are aware that God is never outdone in generosity and that we each will be judged not on the amount we give to others, but on the intensity of love that is behind the gift.

Let us invoke Our Lady who gave of herself totally to the Lord and shares intimately in her Son’s mission of mercy. She, who dedicated herself to God in the Temple as a young girl and who the Church as always looked upon as the *summa contemplatrix*, demonstrates for all believers the need to immerse ourselves in the Lord so as to see things with spiritual eyes and to respond generously by faith, hope and love.

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