

There is a saying in Korea that is roughly translated as: The trusted ax strikes your foot. It teaches us that there is nothing that is absolutely trustworthy. Also there is another that is related: Knock on the stone bridge, before you cross. It imparts the wisdom of verifying something before one wholly commits oneself to it. These Korean sayings reflect healthy skepticism. It is prudent to be cautious, when we do not know for sure.

But what about Christian faith? Did anyone decide to become a Christian, because one verified God's existence before one committed oneself to God? Have you believed in God, because you have verified God's reality?

I've met a few people who talked about God with such conviction and certainty. There was hardly any room for uncertainty in their faith. Does this mean that they had strong faith, and that they were faithful people?

The strength of one's conviction does not necessarily mean that one knows God or faithful to God. When you think about it, everything we talk about God is not based on verification: what we think we know about God is actually the expression of our beliefs in God.

A belief in God fundamentally lacks certainty. If we are certain about something, then it has been verified. Once something is verified, it is no longer a belief. It becomes known as: a fact. A fact is not a belief. Who would need faith, if everything about God were certain and verified?

Do you truly know God? Apostle Paul mentions about that person who knows the thoughts of God in his First Letter to the Corinthians (2:10, 11):

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Who can truly know God? Who can be so much like the Spirit of God that he or she could know God?

Not one of us. If I claim that I truly know God, then I am saying that God and I are one. There is only one person in the Bible who said it, as testified in the Gospel of John (10:30): "I and the Father are one."

If you guessed that it was Jesus, you are right. Christian theology will argue that Jesus knew God perfectly, and that God was present in him in the fullness.

Now if we allow this theological argument, then the teachings of Jesus may be accepted as an accurate portrayal of the attributes of God. For example, God is God of justice and God of love; God is on the side of the oppressed, not the oppressors'; and God is not pleased with arrogance, greed, hypocrisy, or pride in people. These are the content of the lesson Jesus taught to the people.

In today's lectionary, scribes are portrayed as the negative example not to be emulated. Scribes are also known as lawyers, because they were the ones who split hairs on the scriptural interpretations. They were the elite of the society, the experts on the biblical law.

Obviously they commanded a lot of respect, for they were learned, rich, and with authority. But Jesus nailed what they were truly like, and ripped away the white robes and exposed what they hid inside: they liked being greeted and respected, so that they intentionally took a stroll in the busy market; they took the best seat and place of honor. But guess what they actually did behind the scene: they devoured widows' houses. They were predators.

Widows were powerless in the male-dominant society. The only thing a widow had was her house, but the scribes rapaciously devoured it from the widow. Then they faked their holiness by saying long prayers, so that

others might see them. So Jesus concluded with a simple verdict: "They will receive the greater condemnation."

Wow, one might object, and say: Should scribes be slapped with extra punishments for that? If a widow could not maintain her house, having no income, should she be allowed to keep her house? What is wrong with seeking to be respected, to have the ego stroked the right way, to be popular, to claim honor, and to appear spiritual in the public's eye? What is wrong with impressing others by dropping a heavy money bag into the coffer?

If that is what some one might say, then how about this? What if we are so used to certain cultural standards and moral behaviors, that we do not realize what we have been practicing for so long is repugnant to God?

Within our story, there is a tacit connection between the widow in general and the particular widow. The poor widow whom Jesus watched might have well been a

victim whose house had been swallowed by a scribe. All other rich people in the story so far showed off their worthiness and respectability in front of others with appearance and with their own wealth.

The elite, the rich folk, all depended on their material wealth, in order to prove their respectability and honor. The poor widow just dropped all she had—two coins—and walked away. But it was the poor widow's coins that grabbed Jesus' attention.

To Jesus, such is the act that God takes notice. Material wealth fails to impress God. But the offering of two coins gets God's full attention, *because* she had given all she had, despite her abject poverty. Our God does notice the individual context, and is not at all impressed with flaunting of the material wealth.

As far as this God is concerned, the rich folks will have to give all they have, just to stand on the equal terms with the poor widow.

I suspect that the rich would rather die than give up all they have. That is one of the reasons why material wealth oftentimes hinders one's entry into the kingdom of God. Some people are too committed to their material wealth. Perhaps that is the reason why the rich have difficulty with the kingdom of God.

If this was the way Jesus taught, then that is the way God of Jesus revealed it to him. God likes things in certain ways, and Jesus taught his disciples the way God's way is. God's way counters the secular, human way to which almost everyone is acclimated.

The Christians know that God does not like putting up the appearance. God likes WYSIWYG: "what-you-see-is-what-you-get." God like having the wrapping paper reflect what is inside. We the Christian disciples need to make a decision early on: whether to seek honor and recognition among men, or

to seek honor and recognition from God.

It took only a couple coins to draw the attention of Jesus. But those two were all the poor widow had. From this we know: what perks up God's attention is the total commitment. Would you withhold your children's college tuition, because you need to buy the season tickets for your favorite football team? In a loving relationship, one does not withhold anything, but gives everything.

Putting up the appearance, seeking honor and recognition among men, or showing off one's financial prowess fails to draw God's attention. These things will, instead, draw attention of men. They are the secular, human things, but not spiritual at all. These things actually interfere with the spiritual growth of a person, and hinder the spiritual fellowship with God. It prevents one from the total commitment to the kingdom of God.