

# No Cameras Please

Thanks to the generous support of Hagop Demirjian and family from New York, we have video cameras installed around our church and hall. These are helpful when we have events, because we can see and respond to several things simultaneously; the wedding planner is at the front door, the flower guy drove up to the back and the caterers need help in the kitchen. If this was all the cameras did, we would be satisfied. But these cameras not only show live feeds, they also record. If we need to, we can go back for weeks to see who approached the church and hall, what happened and why. So be careful; we see everything around here!

Don't be nervous though; lucky for you-and me-there are no video cameras on the inside of this church. Sure, sometimes Teresa takes so many photos that it's like a short video. But rest assured; I can't see what you are doing when my back is turned, you can't see anything behind the closed curtain, and none of us can see how much anyone else puts in the collection plate. And this is how it should be. There aren't cameras inside this church because of privacy, but that's not the biggest reason. There will never be cameras in this church, because no one in this church-from priest to parish council, to pre-schooler is in a position to look from the outside at another person, and judge their faithfulness.

Only God has the technology to look inside the walls of this church and judge faithfulness. He alone can peer into the inside of this church, and the inside of our very hearts. As scripture says, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Sam 16:7). Jesus privileges us in today's Gospel reading to have a look through his penetrating spiritual camera, and through it we see that what's going on inside of a church and believer is much more important than what appears on the outside. Here is a glimpse of what Jesus sees with his 'God-vision' as he sits with his disciples-opposite the temple in Jerusalem-and watches people put money in the collection.

*Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'* Mk 12:42-44

With the benefit of Jesus' soul penetrating insight, the moral of this story seems obvious. The widow's gift counted more because of its sacrifice; because she gave all she had, where the others gave of their excess. But, we forget that without Jesus' help, we couldn't see any of this from the outside. From our view, we might judge her and say, all you gave is just a few pennies? From our view, we might see an unattractively dressed woman, and judge her for being all alone. From the outside, her gifts, her self, seems insignificant. We need the eyes of faith and the eyes of Christ to see inside. And what we see, is that the inside of this widow's heart was as beautiful as the inside of Solomon's magnificent temple where she gave this gift. What we see is that our gifts to God, church and others are not judged absolutely, but proportionately, by how much of us there is in it; and this widow gave everything she had. Here each of us stewards of St. Hagop are reminded and encouraged to continue to put our hearts into our beloved church and give all we can.

We have officially begun the stewardship season in our church, where we yearly consider our blessings and how much we wish to give of time, talent and treasure to this church. Today Jesus and the widow remind us that the first question before us is not how much we give, that question follows the deeper question of how much of our selves are in our gifts to God and his church. Is the time we give in prayer to God on Sundays and every day the scraps of our time, or the best of our time? Is our monetary pledge to church an amount we don't even notice, or does it give us pause to give to St. Hagop a sizable portion of what we've been blessed with? Do we keep our distance in serving this church or do we get our hands dirty serving the ministries of this church; outreach to shut-ins, education of our children, serving in the kitchen and sending late night emails? However much of you and I, however much of our hearts are in these things, will ultimately determine the value of our offerings in the eyes of God and in the unfolding of his heavenly kingdom.

Many of us make the mistake of playing our lives in front of an imaginary camera, doing good because of how it will look to us and look to others. Let's turn these cameras off, because they show nothing of our heart and soul, and trick us into making judgements about ourselves and others which we are in no position to make. There really is no camera on us, so much as a sacred camera within us, equipped with a flash of the light of Christ, which takes every gift from our hearts and projects it through the darkness, all the way unto the eternal reaches of the heavens; now and always, amen.

