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Here is a parable about an Indian peasant.

'I was begging from door to door in the village when a golden chariot appeared in the distance. I wondered who can this 'King among Kings' be. My hopes rose high that my days as a pauper were at an end. With hands outstretched, I stood there waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth to be scattered on all sides around me. The chariot pulled up where I stood. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then all of a sudden the King held out his right hand and said: 'What have you to give to me'? Oh what a kingly jest it was, to open his palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood there undecided. Then from my sack I reluctantly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to Him. But how great was my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my sack on the floor to find the least little grant of gold among the corn. I bitterly wept and wished I had the heart to give him the lot.'

When we appear before God at the end of time I wonder how much gold will we have with us to present to God. Jesus says: 'the amount you measure out is the amount we will be given back'. Are we 'laying up this treasure in Heaven' where it will last, or on earth where it certainly won't.

The Scribes, whom Jesus warned the people to be aware of, would have given a great deal more money than the poor widow but, unlike her, they made a big show of giving in order to impress. We could say that they were 'giving with one hand and taking back with another'. Not so, the poor widow. She would have gone unnoticed by everyone in the crowd, except, of course, Jesus who can read the heart. He knew how much giving had cost her. He knows how big-hearted we are as well. He's not taken in by grand gestures i.e. people who make a big show of giving like the scribes.

The story of the widow's mite is not just about generous giving but also about having the humility to receive. Jesus didn't run

after the widow and shove the money back into her hand, telling her she couldn't afford it. It was the same with the beggar in the opening story. The king allowed him to feel justly proud of himself by parting with something of his own, howsoever small.

Jean Vanier, the founder of the worldwide L'Arche community for the mentally disabled said: 'The important thing is not to stifle these people with gifts but to give them a chance to return your love and enter into the world of sharing.' A mentally disabled person, he says, 'feels they are giving you joy even when giving you something very little'. Perhaps that could also be a timely piece of advice in the lead-up to Christmas where your children are concerned. Don't stifle the kids or grandkids with gifts but give them opportunities to share.

Coming across as not wanting help from anyone is not what it's about. Even Jesus Himself can attest to that. When parched with thirst, he asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. When Veronica wiped his blood stained face he didn't push her away but felt indebted to her. He also dared to ask the small boy to part with his five loaves and two fish. Each of them was amply rewarded for their big-heartedness. God will not be outdone in generosity.

The story of the widow's mite challenges us in two ways. Have we the largesse of heart to give generously regardless of how much it will cost us. Are we humble enough not to reject the help of others but accept it with a grateful heart? If the answer is 'yes' to both, we have fulfilled our deepest human need - to love and be loved which is also at the heart of our faith.