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An Indian folk-story

'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.'

At the end of our lives, how much gold will we have to show for our life's work here on earth? 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, it was mostly for show. 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 see into our hearts. He knew how much giving had cost her. She gave all she had to live on. He knows how magnanimous we are as well.

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 good about 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 them 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 something we keep at the back of our minds in the lead-up to Christmas - especially where children or grandchildren are concerned. Yes, by all means give them gifts but also opportunities to share.

Coming across as self-sufficient in everything betrays a certain smugness. Even Jesus relied on people for help. 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. He dared to ask a small boy to part with his five loaves and two fish.

The story of the widow's mite challenges us in two ways. Do we give without counting the cost? Are we open to accept the help of others with a grateful heart? If so we have fulfilled our deepest human need - to love and be loved which is at the heart of the gospel.