

I remember a birthday party I was at as a child. We had all brought presents for our friend. The party was like many other birthday parties – the usual games, the birthday cake, the jelly and ice cream and of course the egg sandwiches I always associate with birthday parties of that era.

But when we came to leave, the boy whose birthday we were celebrating handed a present back to one of his guests in front of us all. ‘Thank you for bringing this Anthony but I don’t collect these things – so would you take it back?’ I can still see the look of hurt, of rejection on Anthony Palmer’s face – that so little was thought of a gift that he had chosen for a friend.

In our reading this morning, we are given a picture of something happening around the Temple in Jerusalem. There’s a collection box. Lots of different people are coming along to make their donations. The rich and powerful are putting in their lavish gifts in a way that draws attention to them. Among those coming to give, Jesus spots someone that no-one else seems to notice, a poor widow quietly slips a few coins into the collection.

Jesus called his disciples over and said, "The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all."

Other people looking on saw the size of the gifts that were being offered. Jesus saw more than the size of the gift, Jesus saw what that gift meant for the woman who gave her few coins.

We're talking here of gratitude. We are all called to be givers, people prepared to help, to encourage, to support. That might be in the school playground, in our place of work, in our homes and communities. It does not have to be big – the kind word, the hug, or simply listening. What is important is the spirit in which all this is done.

At some time or another, we are all going to be receivers when we are discouraged, when we are distressed. Whether we are giving or receiving, no gift is too small to make a difference; no gift is too small to be received with gratitude. In the kind word, the hug, the listening ear, Jesus is there. I often think back to the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

In a short while we will be offering up our prayers. We will be joining with people all over Europe who will be remembering the end of the First World War 100 years ago. We will be remembering all those who died, all those who suffered. How can we best remember, how can we best honour their loss?

The best way to do that would be to do whatever we can, however small, however insignificant to be peace makers in our homes, in our schools, our places of work, in our communities.

In the words of a hymn we will be singing shortly:

Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life let me bring hope,
where there's darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy: