

**November 8, 2009 – the Twentieth-third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder** **Mark 12:38-44**

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take my mind and think through it; take my heart and set it on fire for your Holy Gospel.” +Amen.

I still remember the day that I received that letter in the mail from the University of Pennsylvania in the spring of 1978. That was my top choice for the university I most wanted to attend. As I opened the thin letter, not a good sign, I read those words of rejection that no one is ever really ready for emotionally, especially at the ripe old age of 17. And yet, if I had been accepted to the University of Pennsylvania all that was soon to happen in my life may not have ever occurred; including my active duty on the USS Coral Sea, and three years later my engagement to Ellen. Still, it is always hard to receive a NO in life.

The great motivational writer and speaker, Dr. Stephen Covey, has said that the no's we receive in life point us to the greater yes's. And that is certainly true. However, perhaps the greater lesson that we receive from those no's, those disappointments in life, is that you and I are called by Jesus to walk humbly before God; that the only way that we can grow spiritually in our faith and life in Jesus Christ is to be in a constant posture of humility before Almighty God.

The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, founder of one of the three major schools of psychotherapeutic thought, defined EGO in 1923 as the conscious

part of a person's psyche that controls thought and behavior, and interprets one's reality. He said ego was in essence our self-awareness. According to Freud we all have EGO, but many people have quite unhealthy ones. And more than 2000 years ago, centuries and centuries before Freud's definition, Jesus tackles this same human dilemma as he teaches in the temple: *Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at the banquets! They devour widow's houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.*

This is a simple story that points to a not so simple road-block to living fully the life that Jesus lived and died for, and to which as Risen Lord calls each of us. Jesus while teaching in the temple juxtaposes the behavior of the scribes with the story that he tells of the poor widow. The woman who has so little, and is likely shunned in the marketplace, and does not even have a seat at the banquet table, approaches God with all that she has and offers it to God. The scribes with an unhealthy ego act for show and give out of abundance, while the poor widow in great humility offers to God with no show, all that she possesses.

Five centuries after Christ delivered this teaching, St. Augustine said it this way: *Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.* So twenty-one centuries following this call by Jesus what shall we consider today?

- Do you approach God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with humility, as one in need of grace and forgiveness? “Most merciful God, I confess that I have sinned...”
- Do we approach our families, our loved ones, and this community of faith at Trinity with humility?
- Do you approach the complex issues that face the Christian Church, especially the Episcopal Church, and American society and global issues with the humility of the poor widow, or actions and egos of the scribes?

The gospel for this day of November 8<sup>th</sup> is one where Jesus challenges us to check our EGO—that which “edges God out.” The Christian Gospel challenges us to find our centeredness in the humble place, in order that we may grow, serve, minister fully for God’s Kingdom, and respond in faith to the YES to which God calls. +Amen.