

2024-12-11 - Giving

Our topic for today is the virtue of Giving. The Lord Jesus in Luke 6 says: "Give, and it will be given to you"

The commandment that He tells us is "give" - there is no specific, just "give."

There are many things that we can give: a smile, a good word, money, time, energy, a listening ear, a warm welcome. And the more we give, the more we receive.

We'll read together today from 2 Corinthians 8. We read in the Book of Acts, that there was going to be a famine in the world. And the disciples determine to send relief to Judea. So St Paul, as part of his missionary journey, collects some of those funds to go back to Jerusalem.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, St Paul talks about giving to the Corinthians, by giving them the example of the Macedonians.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality."

- The churches of Macedonia (e.g. Philippi, Thessaloniki) were persecuted churches. They were being persecuted by the Jews and had great trials of affliction, and on top of that, St Paul tells us "deep poverty." Yet, what gave them joy was that they were able to generously give to the brethren in Judea.
- **Giving Imparts Joy**
 - We are in the season of Christmas here, a season of giving and you see the joy on someone's face when they give a gift, and even more, the joy of the gift-giver. It is something we have all experienced.
 - When you call someone to ask about them, and maybe no one has asked about them before, and they are joyful.
 - When you visit someone who is mourning, and your visit brings joy to their face
 - When you give appreciation to someone who has worked hard and done a great act, they have more joy from your gift of appreciation, than from accomplishing the thing itself
 - When you encourage someone who is down, they are joyful
 - And their joy is infectious and you too become joyful

"For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability"

- There is a servant who gives in his service according to his ability. Katar khero. But then there is a servant who gives beyond his ability. This is what the Macedonians were doing.
- **Give Beyond Your Ability**

- We can remember here the two mites of the widow. This woman only had two small coins - it was beyond her ability to give anything in the Temple. And yet, she did not hesitate to drop them both in the collection box.
- Fr Reweis told me a story once about a very elderly man in Canada who was over 80 years old, and insisted to stay in the service of Orban. And those of you who serve in the Orban know that it is not a gentle or light service. But you come out sweating and having exerted yourself. So this man was serving BEYOND what his body and his age allowed. And one day they came to the church and found him laying in the street outside the door of the church from exhaustion, after completing his service. He was giving beyond his ability.
- Many times when asked of a service, I might look at my ability and say I can't do it. But actually, I am underestimating my ability.
 - One time a youth told me that he cannot serve the service of the altar because he can't wake up that early because he sleeps late. But on the same day, another servant would work a shift the whole night, fasting from food and water, so that he can come to his service after work. Beyond the ability.

"they were freely willing,"

- The Macedonians heard about the need in Jerusalem, and they encouraged each other to give as much as they could and even more, freely. They didn't wait for St Paul to tell them or to ask them for anything.
- **Giving is Freely Willed**
 - The carnal man may look at his paycheck and say "if I give from this, I won't have enough to pay my bills." But the spiritual man will look at the paycheck and say "let me give from this, knowing that God will provide for me to pay my bills."
 - HE Metropolitan Youssef has said before that "man says seeing is believing, but God says believing is seeing." Believe first, and you will see.
 - Freely willed means giving without thinking. Someone asks a service of you and you say yes before knowing the details. Before thinking about it. Someone says "I need a service from you" and you say "I am at your service"
 - Fr Daoud Lamei gives an example of one time they were doing a service in a place of less means, and one of the men with them was so moved by what he saw that he took everything out of his wallet and asked Abouna "will God accept this from my hand?" To the point that Abouna told him "it's too much!" and the man said "if I knew people were living like this, I would have done more. But this is what I have right now. Will God accept it?" - He was not thinking or trying to be logical about it. He was giving with a free will.
 - I can't wait for someone or the church to tell me "come serve" - but let me go and serve, and that day of service will be the most valuable day of the week.
 - I can't wait for the church to say "we have a project and we need funds" - but let me come and give, and the day of giving will be for me the most valuable day of the week.
 - There is a point that sometimes waiting for someone to say "give me" may ruin the blessing of giving. Sometimes we have a servant very dedicated to the liturgy on a weekday, so we tell him "come and serve" with us and we put him on the schedule

and after that, he only comes on the day he is scheduled.

"implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

- The Macedonians went to St Paul with humility and urged him to accept their gift to minister to the saints in Jerusalem.
- **Giving is a Grace**
 - See how St Paul calls the gift "the grace" (in Arabic translation... el ne3ma).
 - He who gives is just a middleman - taking from the hand of God, and putting it in the hand of someone else who needs it.
 - If you give a smile - where did you get that smile in the first place? Was it not from God, who imparts all joy and happiness?
 - If you give from your talents - where did you acquire those talents in the first place? Was it not from God, from whom all good gifts come?

"And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God"

- The Macedonians gave themselves to the Lord first, and then to the apostles - who are the ministers of the Lord.
- **Giving is to God**
 - To give yourself to the Lord means to say that all that I have is Yours. My talents, my money, my virtues, my ideas, my thoughts, my energy, my time - all is in Your hands. And then to give yourself to the ministers of the Lord - is to give all of those to the Church, represented by the father the priest, and to say "use it." Use my talents, my money, my virtues, my ideas, my thoughts, my energy, my time.
 - Sometimes we want to pick and choose what to give. I was talking to a youth once who told me "when I come to the church, no one gives me the microphone to sing in it" and this is not uncommon in the service of the deacons. But it's the wrong attitude. When I come to the church and to my service, I am giving myself in the Lord. I am giving my talents to be used in the service however I am asked to use them. And in the end, it is an offering to God.

"So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well."

- Titus went ahead to Corinth before St Paul, in order to start the process with them. The giving here was organized with Titus responsible for it - receiving the gift, organizing it, documenting and recording it, making sure it's delivered appropriately, etc.
- **Giving is with Order**
 - Any gift is given in order. When the Lord was given 5 loaves and 2 fish as a gift, He did not just haphazardly pass it around. But He told the disciples to organize the people in groups of 50, and then gave them baskets with which to distribute the food to those groups.
 - When we come to give ourselves in service, as deacons, we come and find that the liturgy is arranged with who will serve in what position, what does each position do,

etc.

- When we give from our money in the church, we find there is someone who is collecting it, counting it, documenting it, taking it to the bank, allocating it to specific services and projects and to the poor and needy, etc.
- When we give guidance, it needs wisdom and planning, and to be sound
- When we have a condolences in the church and we attend it (yes, this is giving!) we find that it is organized with prayers and psalms and songs and hymns and a spiritual word, with some other times for greetings and words of comfort.

"But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also."

- The Corinthians were abounding (excelling) in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in diligence, and in love. And St Paul is reminding them - see that you also abound and excel in the grace of giving.
- **Giving is Necessary**
 - Someone might say "well I pray and read the Bible and I attend many liturgies. Why do I need to give?" - see that you abound in the grace of giving also.
 - "Well I serve in Sunday School and I give from my time and my energy. Time is money! So why do I need to give from my money?" - see that you abound in this grace also.
 - "Well I give tithes and even more than tithes. Why do I need to give from my time or my energy? Or why should I go and serve?" - see that you abound in this grace also

"I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others."

- St Paul here was not giving a commandment to the Corinthians or trying to force or compel them to give, or to give a certain amount. But he was giving them the example of the Macedonians and their diligence and how it brought them joy.
- **Giving is Love**
 - I cannot give if I do not love. And by giving, I show my love.
 - When I ask about someone and call them and say "we missed you today!" - this is giving, and this is out of the abundance of love for him.
 - When I encourage someone and tell him "it will get better, the Lord is with you" - this is giving, and it is out of the abundance of love for him.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

- Christ, who was the richest, who sat on a throne and was ministered to by angels - decided to be born in a manger, to a poor family, to live as a carpenter. He came to the earth in its poverty, so that He can give us the whole of the Kingdom of Heaven in its riches.
- **Giving has a Reward**

- As the commandment says: "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom."
- The Lord here used the imagery of a generous merchant. A cheap merchant may take his measuring cup and swipe it into the barley and hand it to you. But a generous and fair merchant will take the measuring cup, swipe into the barley, press it down, shake it to occupy all the space in the measuring cup, and keep doing this until the cup overflows. This is our Lord, the generous Giver who will give to us when we give.

"And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as *there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.*"

- The Corinthians had made a commitment to give to Jerusalem about a year ago, and now St Paul is telling them to finish what they started - "Shed 7elak." And again, he is not commanding them, but giving them advice.
- **Giving is Contagious**
 - When we first give, we are unsure. But then we see that there is a blessing, so we give more. The blessing increases and there is peace and goodness, so we are transformed from the Act of Giving to the Desire of Giving. It becomes second nature to us. We stop thinking about it.

Finally, what can I give?

- When we think of giving, we always think of money. And it is good and right and commanded of us to give from our money and our earnings that God has given us. But some people don't just need money...
- Some need for someone just to ASK about them
- Some need a smile
- Some need encouragement
- Some need appreciation
- Some need comfort (tub tub 3aleh)
- Some need visitation
- Some need guidance
- Some need honor and respect
- Some need a compliment
- Some need to mourn and someone to mourn with them
- Some are in need of money and other things like medicine or clothing or furniture

All of these are needs that have in front of them the virtue of giving

- I should give from my time
- I should give from my energy
- I should give from my talents

As deacons, we are servants. The deacons in Acts 6 were chosen in order that they can serve the tables and serve the widows. We are servants of the people, and part of our role and our

responsibility is to give to the people. We have a very important liturgical role in guiding the people in prayer - whether from inside or outside. But the more important role is to give.

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