

32nd Sunday of the Year

Year B

God In Whom We Trust.

We must not be afraid to give, for Christ gave himself completely and will reward with salvation all those who are waiting for him.

(Readings: 1 Kings 17: 10-16. Hebrews 9: 24-28. Mark 12: 38-44.)

Today Our Lord teaches us the lesson of generosity. He approaches the subject in the opposite way from the world; a world which would say that a 'generous man' is one who, from his wealth, donates vast sums of money to charity. But Our Lord turns this idea on its head by singling out a poor woman; a widow who gave only two very small value coins. The difference between the widow and the rich man is that she gave all she had, whereas he gave only what he could spare. And so, this gospel story prompts us to examine how, and why, we give.

There is a lovely Indian fable about a poor beggar who lived in a State ruled by a Maharajah. (Obviously, it's an old story.) The poor man lived in a hut, and every day he would sit begging on the roadside of a busy trade route. Almost every day he would receive some grains of rice, and, occasionally, a little money, not much, but just enough for him to eke out his very meagre existence. One day he heard that the Maharajah, himself, was to pass his way. And naturally, he was quite excited at the prospect. Moreover, he was going to make absolutely sure that the Maharajah wouldn't pass him by without putting a sizable donation into his bowl.

As a six-horse, drawn carriage was approaching, the beggar ran out onto the road, causing the carriage to stop abruptly. He thrust out his bowl to the wealthy Maharajah, expecting to receive enough money to look after himself for months.

The Maharajah looked kindly at him and said, "My friend, people are always giving to you. For a change you give me something." Well, the poor beggar was utterly gob smacked. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. But he could not, dare not, refuse the authority, the demand, of the all-powerful Maharajah.

And so, his astonishment quickly turned to anger. In fact, he was beside himself with rage. He knew, now, how the rich got rich, and how they grew richer still, by taking what little the poor had. Reluctantly he opened the pitiful bag of rice he had tied to his side, and he grudgingly held it out to the rich man.

"How many grains of rice am I to take?" asked the Maharajah. "Five", came back the curt, resentful, answer. Slowly, and deliberately, the Maharajah took each grain as he counted them out aloud. He then blessed the poor beggar for his generosity and ordered the carriage to start off again.

With a very sore heart, the poor beggar returned to his makeshift hut to prepare what was left of his pitifully meagre evening meal. He began to wash the small handful of rice. And as he did so, a small glittering object attracted his attention. Picking it up he saw that it was a grain of solid gold! He looked for more and found exactly five golden grains. He then realised that the Maharajah must have dropped them into his bowl, in exchange for the five grains of rice that he had so grudgingly given him. Well, he berated himself as he lamented his stupidity, "If only I had given him every grain of rice I had!"

The moral of this story is not about missed opportunities. Neither is it about failing to recognise the chance of a real earner. It is to remind us of the sad, wretchedness, of giving solely in order to be rewarded, of giving, merely to receive more in return.

The passage in today's Gospel demands that we should examine the motives behind our giving.

A person may give, out of a sense of duty, much in the same way that one pays income tax, as something one cannot really avoid. One may give purely from motives of self-interest, regarding each donation as another entry, on the credit side, in the 'Good Deeds' ledger. Such giving is simply rationalised selfishness.

Some people give in order to feel superior. This kind of giving can be extremely patronising, even cruel. It can be far more hurtful to the one in need than a blunt refusal. When a person gives like that, it's like standing on a pedestal, looking down on a poor wretch. And when a donation is made, it tends to be accompanied by a smug, condescending lecture. It would be better not to give at all, than to give merely to gratify one's own vanity, or one's desire for acknowledged supremacy.

But there are those who give because they simply cannot help themselves; those whose hearts are so big, and so full of love, they are compelled to generosity. – That is the real way to give.

The law of God's kingdom is that if a man gives for show he has already received his reward. But if a man gives in secret, he will most definitely receive his reward in the next life.

The only real giving is that which is motivated, and which is inspired, by the uncontrollable outflow of love. 'God gave us his Only-begotten Son because he so loved the world'. – That is how we must give. If our love for God, and for our neighbour, is right, our giving will be right.

Lord Balfour has some very fitting words to say on the subject of 'Giving':

“The best thing to give
to your enemy, is forgiveness;
to an opponent, is tolerance;
to a friend, your heart;
to your child, a good example;
to a father, deference;
to your mother,
conduct that will make her proud of you;
to yourself, respect;
to all men, charity.”