

The Spirituality of Giving: Teaching and Practice  
Part 1 – Teaching

When someone in church is scheduled to present on the theme of “Giving,” it is usually sometime during the Fall season and the “giving” is about the financial resources needed to support the parish. The proximity of Thanksgiving Day makes allusions to “giving thanks,” through the annual pledge campaign, a handy and appropriate segue. Yet, the focus on the “Three T” Time – Talent – Treasure, for all of its suggestive and efficient framing each November, tends to exhibit the parish’s budgetary needs as the primary picture. However, Stewardship is not an annual campaign. Before and beyond budgets, stewardship is all about the *Spirituality of Giving*. And the Church’s teaching on giving is the spirituality of living—the joy and hope in believing that through Christ we can grow into becoming what God intends so that with all creation we give glory to God.

Giving and Living through Christ is the heart of our prayer today, that we “know... Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life” by following in his steps. How do we follow in his steps? Psalm 31 v5 gives a compelling response: “Into your hands I commend my spirit... O Lord.” Did you know these words came from the psalms? We certainly know them coming from the cross. When you think about it, these lyrics by David, though spoken by Jesus to God on Good Friday’s end, were sung by him throughout his life. Daily praying “Into your

hands I commend my spirit” has us following in the steps of Christ, giving who you are to God—a crucial step in the Spirituality of Giving. The other step, we hear this morning from the First letter of Peter. “”Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow (a sort of calcium-fortified strength, we can suppose) into... a living stone. By giving who you are for the good of others you become living stones. “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,” as church, “to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.” Like Thomas the Apostle, though, as depicted in today’s Gospel from John, we do not necessarily know the way. “Lord, what are these spiritual sacrifices? How can we know the way to do, to offer them?” Jesus says “I am the way, and the truth and the life.... If you know me, I will do whatever you ask in my name.” Not whatever we ask, but whatever we ask in the name of Christ. For asking in the name of Christ means we have prayerfully filtered our needs, wants and desires through Christ—Christ’s way, God’s will, the Church’s mission: reconciling all creation. “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son”—so that through Christ we give ourselves in order that more people know God. These are the spiritual sacrifices of God’s people. But like Thomas, we might still be saying we still don’t know the way. How can we do this giving is living spirituality? Jesus was summarizing his life, teaching his giving and living,

his way-truth-life, beginning at the Last Supper, in preparation for his last days on earth, preparing his followers for all the days of their life.

Maundy Thursday: Christ on his knees, calling us to serve.

Good Friday: Christ on the cross, commending himself to God.

Easter: Christ risen, calling each one of us by name.

Christ's Way, Truth, Life is the reality of our existence—giving is living. If we would truly live, then we must center on how to live Christ's life in our bodies. If we would hope to live in the way that is truthful—to raise our children, to love our partners, to appreciate and be there for friends, and to turn enemies into friends—then we must embody Christ's living and dying and rising, so that we carry the Peace of Christ in our bodies. This is how we become living stones for God's Reconstruction Project. We are built up as a spiritual house. We become another room in God's house, a Christ-filled dwelling place. And we can offer spiritual sacrifices.

What are these "spiritual sacrifices"? They are gifts and the practice of gift-giving—giving of ourselves. The Spirituality of Giving teaches that life is as basic as receiving a gift and saying thank you, accepting that all things come from God—Creation, Love, and the Christ who comes to put creation back together, forgiving us for despoiling love. On his knees, Christ meets people where they are. Then, learning to become a gift—the gift you share with others—people meet

Christ in each other. Christ is really present in the giving and receiving, really present in that exchange, in that time and space where giving and receiving cross—where cross becomes resurrection. New life, new possibilities, change, amazing grace: the spirituality of giving is the spirituality of living.

“I go to prepare a place for you.” Life as we know it is only the beginning of life. Jesus is always going ahead of us to prepare a place. Jesus is giving us the gift so that we can become the Body of Christ. The Spirituality of Giving is Resurrection Theology. The teaching of this way of life happens in practice through our bodily contact with the Risen Christ day by day. We need to practice our capacity for spiritual sacrifice: gift-giving and receiving. In this exchange, in this crossing, we can become an experience of Resurrection, an offering for reconciliation. The Spirituality of Giving is the practice of living as we begin to embody Jesus by walking in Christ’s way, conversing in Christ’s truth, and sharing Christ’s life. Amen.

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