

The Spirituality of Giving: Teaching and Practice
Part 2 – Practice

Last week, you will recall, I suggested that our understanding of stewardship might deepen and expand if, instead of focusing on Fall campaigns for Time, Talent and Treasure, we consider the heart of the Paschal/Easter reality—Christ on his knees meeting human needs, Christ on the cross needing none other than God, and the Risen Christ calling us each by name. I presented under the heading “The Spirituality of Giving,” and now I would like to ever-so-briefly rehearse the teaching before we go on to consider the practice of giving.

The *Spirituality of Giving* is all about our giving and living through Christ—prayerfully offering our needs, wants and desires to Christ so that through Christ we give ourselves in order that more people might know God. Our recognizing Christ in fellow humanity and our faithful trust in God supplies us with an openness to being called and a readiness for being sent into the daily situations of life. The Spirituality of Giving, the Spirituality of Living, is as basic as receiving a gift and saying thank you. Learning to become a gift—the gift you share with others—means we have to practice our capacity for gift-giving and receiving. In gift-giving, an exchange takes place—a crossing over between the one who gives and the one who receives. In this crossing, transformation takes place. In, with and

through our bodies, we can become an experience of Resurrection, an offering for reconciliation, as co-agents with God for putting the world back together again.

That is the teaching, the heart of the Christian Gospel which, in today's reading from Acts, Paul is trying to convey to the Greeks gathered at the Areopagus. "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way". Here Paul is not complimenting the people in saying they are religious. A better translation than 'extremely religious' would be Paul saying that Athenians are 'pathetically addicted' to the worship of gods, keeping up with whatever is the fashionable god as well as how to make offerings to them. Besides, Paul says, "The God who made the world and everything in it...is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything". God is not interested in religious people but faithful people. Paul is reminding everybody—Jew, Greek Gentile and new Christian—that God does not need our thanks. Yet, and here is the point, God loves our thanks. Our self-offerings, our thanks-giving, is an expression of love that moves us more and more into a right relationship with God; and the love relationship with God "exceeds all that we can desire".

So, then, how do we practice the Spirituality of Giving—gift-giving and saying thank you? Perhaps, there are as many creative ways as there are open and willing people. That would come out in conversation about our practices. And

here are just a few comments for generating reflection, discussion and decision-making about the practice of giving and receiving:

- Practicing the Spirituality of Giving is what we do after we say “I will, with God’s help”.
- We do not give to get but to contribute.
- When we give, how do we feel about getting *change* back?
- Traditionally, there is the Biblical Tithe—giving 10% of what you have. In more contemporary times, the Modern Tithe has been put forth: offering 5% to one’s church and 5% given to meet human needs encountered in the world. But who is even thinking tithe—traditional or modern—these days? The Spirituality of Giving, however, does compel us to think about meet and right proportions of self-giving: Proportional Giving—growing in giving, growing in the Body of Christ.
- What are we giving for? What in God’s Name are we giving for? What on earth are we doing for heaven’s sake? What are we giving?
- This spiritual practice strengthens us not for giving *to* the Church but *through* the Church.
- The Spirituality of Giving engages us in practices that sharpen our senses and clarify our vision such that we give not to a budget but for the building up of God’s people.

- Can we imagine a annual pledge campaign that does not involve budget figures but instead takes a close look at our own practices for growing in giving and saying thank you?
- Not trimming the figures but adding on?!
- The Spirituality of Giving is the exercise of our Resurrection Bodies. Daily exercise is Stewardship. The basic practices involve our living, breathing, flesh and blood bodies. Gift-giving and saying thank you is the spirituality of living.

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