

JANUARY 22, 2023: 3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



In my last column I talked about how our baptism calls us to be agents of change and mission in the world. We begin to do that by using the gifts and talents God has given us in accord with his will. We are called to embody Christ's life in the way we live our own. Tithing is at the heart of being the embodiment of Christ in the world. It is the recognition that all we have are gifts from God and must be received with an attitude of grateful acceptance. This attitude should lead us to the desire to return to the Lord some sacrifice of thanksgiving. This sacrifice of thanksgiving is at the heart of tithing. We return to the Lord the first 10% of what He has chosen to share with us from his gracious bounty. We give to the Lord *not* from our surplus, but from the fullness of his gifts. We may not be able to do this at first, depending on how we are currently using the Lord's gifts. It may also mean a complete change in our attitude toward the world, and our own expectations of what we "deserve."

But we must remember that tithing is about stewardship—the idea that we truly own nothing. In the beatitudes Christ says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God." The poverty we are called to embrace is not one of being poor, but of recognizing our complete dependence on God. It is rejecting the idea of capitalism and consumption and the American Dream: if I want it I simply need to work hard enough to earn it, and then I have the right to have it. The attitude we are called to have is that all I receive is given in order to promote the Kingdom of God. This attitude, of course, is not intended to impoverish us. The Lord gives to us in order to provide for our needs. But, at the same time we have a responsibility to take no more than what is truly necessary. Again, this does not mean we cannot have nice things, but it does mean we must be very circumspect about the choices we make. In the years that I have tithed, I have never truly wanted for anything, but I have not always got what I desired. And that is an important lesson in itself.

Through prayer, my attitude has changed over time to be more and more accepting of the idea of tithing. This change in attitude has empowered me to be less materialistic and more of a steward of the gifts given me. It has also freed me from being owned by my things. Now, I still buy things, and at times frivolous things, but when that happens, I try to ensure that it does not impact my ability to serve the Lord and return to Him my sacrifice of thanksgiving. I recognize that whenever I spend money, it can not only impact me but can also affect my ability to serve the Lord. It can impact my ability to be Christ to others in their need. But I also realize that spending money helps others by supporting the work they do. It helps to create jobs, which helps the economy to work and people to have jobs. All those things are also good and necessary. Tithing and stewardship is not a call to give away all that we have—a radical call to poverty that some are called to—like Saint Francis. It is about having the right attitude of dependence, thanksgiving and desire to serve God's will. It is about wanting to be that disciple whose very life and use of material goods proclaims the Kingdom of God. It is about living a life where the world does not revolve around "me and my needs." But, rather, it is about desiring to be an instrument of God by sharing his bounty with the world.

This attitude must inevitably lead to a stronger and proper relationship with God. It also leads to seeing all in the world as our brothers and sisters. After Cain killed his brother, God asked him where Abel was. In response Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is 'yes' for all of us. We are personally responsible to help those who are truly in need. We cannot put it off onto another. And it is not about doing it once a year but, rather, every day of our lives. Our very baptism creates a duty and responsibility for us to be Christ in the world. Christ shares with us the gift of his very life. We must do the same. We must respond with a resounding 'yes' to his offer of salvation, and so we say yes to Christ by being Christ. And we come to be Christ by acting like Christ. And we come to act like Christ when we have the same attitude as Christ. And if Christ was willing to offer his life to the Father, then we must ask ourselves, can I do any less? Stewardship and tithing are a means to an end, and *not* an end in themselves: they help us to grow in the attitude of true charity and true poverty of spirit, which brings us into a living relationship with Christ. This relationship is the Kingdom of God.

But, again, stewardship and tithing are not simply about material gifts, and we will explore that further in the next article We will continue to look at how we can make use of God's gracious bounty.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Brian