

11th Sunday after Pentecost 2006: The Gift of Giving

A sermon by Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
Delivered on August 27, 2006

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Christ is among us!

Today we continue our series on the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the building up of God's Holy Church and the fifth gift is giving itself. "Let... he who gives, with liberality" (Rom. 12:8). This word liberality, from the Greek *haplotes* means also generosity, simplicity, single-mindedness, that is, without self-seeking. In both today's Epistle reading and Gospel reading we are presented with the issue of giving. In the Epistle of St. Paul we are finding that the apostle has apparently been obliged to explain and set forth the biblical basis for the Church's need for full time clergy, who are compensated appropriately for their time and effort. Just as soldier who serves his country can expect his country to support him and his family, and no one begrudges the farmer for partaking of the fruits of his labors, so too the must Church's apostles who are sent out to spread the word of God, to fight and labor against the darkness in the hearts of men, and to serve in the vineyard of the Lord as He cultivates and harvests our souls unto everlasting life, be provided for and partake of the earthly fruits of the Church life. That is just common sense. But that is not the reason for our giving in the first place. The reason is revealed to us the parable of the Unmerciful Debtor that we hear in today's Gospel reading.

This Parable teaches us primarily about forgiveness. Who are we to hold grudges and withhold forgiveness from our brothers and sisters when God has so mercifully forgiven us? Thus the variant translation of the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. To understand forgiveness, we must first understand debt. Likewise, to understand Christian

giving we must also understand how we are in debt ourselves. How are we in debt? We might ask. *How are we not in debt?* Might be more appropriate. Everything we have, everything we are, we have received from a good and loving God who created us, nurtured us, and still to this day sustains us. Think about it. Everything we know, we learned from someone else, starting with parents on. Everything we have, we received through the good will and skill of others, who themselves did likewise. St. James says the following that we also pray in thanksgiving at the end of the liturgy: “¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...” (James 1) There is really nothing in this world for which we can fully take credit except our sins—those new debts we incur. Even our good deeds are inspired by Grace, for none is truly good, except God.

This is the basis for why we give, why we are called to give with liberality. We cannot give back to our Creator all that He has given us, but at least we can be like Him and be free and generous towards others. This is what the Creator asks us in return: to show love. That is how we demonstrate our thankfulness for his gifts, and if unable to repay a debt, pay it forward to others without thinking of ourselves. Love is what we give, but love is meaningless without action, without substance. Again St. James argues, “¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it profit?*” (James 2). How can we say we love without showing the fruits thereof? Therefore we give, and the giving itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit acting and dwelling within us, opening our hearts to overcome the love of money and earthly pleasure to love our fellow human beings. The act of giving is an act of healing both ourselves and those to whom we give.

Thus every act of Christian giving must first and foremost be an act of thanksgiving, of Eucharist, and as such, an act of worshipping God the source of all good and perfect gifts.