

# A Devotional Guide to Giving

Teach us, good Lord,  
to serve you as you deserve,  
to give and not to count the cost,  
to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labour and not to ask for any reward,  
save that of knowing that we do your will.

Amen

*Saint Ignatius of Loyola*





# **1. WHAT WE GIVE IS A MEASURE OF HOW MUCH WE LOVE**

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance,  
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-  
control....***

***Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit  
(Gal 5:22 NIV)***

The culture of the society in which we live today shapes how we all view our possessions and what our attitudes to generosity might be. On the one hand we are routinely influenced by advertisers to be constantly aware that our image – the ways in which we think of ourselves and how others see us – depends to a large degree upon our ownership of material possessions which bear the “right” brand-names, whilst on the other hand we are encouraged to over-spend extravagantly on those same material items and to wrap them as presents for each other in an apparent demonstration of love.

By contrast, Christians know that real self-worth comes from knowing that we are children of God the creator; we are loved by him so much that he sent his Son Jesus to bring us close into his presence. In that light our generosity should know no bounds: we want to give him everything that we have – worship and time and money - in order to say thank you for all he has done for us. (Rom 12) And yet for far too

long the world-wide church has approached the subject of giving as a matter of practical housekeeping rather than encouraging Christians to stretch out their hearts and hands in response to their love for God and their neighbours.

This leaflet is about re-examining our attitudes towards our Christian giving within the context of the St Patrick's church family. As each one of us prayerfully reflects upon how we give, our feelings about giving, and our motivation for giving, we will find that our spirituality will be deepened.

# ***1. QUESTIONS FOR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION IN YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME.***

***For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.***

*Romans 4 vv.12-18*

- Most of us pick up different titles during our lifetime: e.g.: Son or daughter, Wife or Husband, Mum or Dad, Grandparent, Worker Foreman, Manager, Director or Chairman, church-goer, believer, Child of God, disciple. What titles are most important to you – and which titles best describe you and the gifts God has given you?
- If you were to rank the gifts above in order from the one you would like most to the one you would like least – where would generosity come? Why?
- Is there any part of the discipline of following Jesus and worshipping with your life that you find more challenging and difficult than other parts?
- How does being a Christian change how you handle money compared with your non-Christian friends? What Bible verses have helped you most?"

## **2. TO GIVE AND NOT TO COUNT THE COST**

***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,  
“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”***

***(Heb 13 v.5 NIV)***

In the early, heady days of Christianity, when Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he was at pains to hold up the new church in Macedonia as an example to us all in the matter of generous giving. Their attitude was, he said,

***“totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives.”***

***(2 Cor 8 vv.5-7 The Message)***

But giving was hardly a new concept for the Jewish people. Throughout the Old Testament – in fact throughout the whole ancient world – people were instructed to give one tenth of their wealth towards the maintenance of their religion and to assist the poor. One tenth seems to have been arrived at as the guideline because it made the maths easy, but soon the tithe became akin to a tax. Throughout history people have been creative in their interpretations of tax laws and so it is maybe not surprising that a great deal of time was spent

debating the legality of what must be included in that catch-all phrase “wealth”.

But in addition to the compulsory tithes (used to support the priests in the Temple, to provide for celebrations and to support the poor) Israelites were also invited to make freewill offerings, not because they were bound to but because they *wanted* to. For instance, in Exodus 35 we read about how the beautiful Tabernacle was built from materials purchased from funds donated by the Israelites over and above their usual tithe. Centuries later, the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt using resources freely given out of the motives of love and devotion.

It was that Old Testament sentiment of generosity which “simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives” which Paul commended. And it is that “Macedonian attitude” which true followers of Jesus display in their discipleship today. Remember Jesus’ own words:

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

*(Matt 6 vv.19-21. NLT)*

God does not say that money or material possessions are problems; he says that they can be the symptoms of real problems. We are constantly warned to guard our hearts against greed, covetousness, ego, pride and other wrong attitudes because these are the tools which Satan uses to control and manipulate us. The possession or absence of material things in our lives is not an issue in God's service it is our attitudes we must watch.

Similarly, the Bible does not tell us that it is unspiritual to budget and to save against, eg, financial retirement. But God does not allow greedy hoarding which transfers security away from God and on to money. We are reminded that God gives to us generously so that we can, in turn, give generously to others on every occasion. As Paul told the Corinthians, our generosity will result in an increase of thanksgiving to God.

Everything we have is given to us by God. It is not wrong to be rich, but it *is* wrong to love money. It is not wrong to be poor, but it *is* wrong to waste money on trivial things. It is not wrong to save money, but it *is* wrong to hoard it. The Bible's consistent message on managing money is that we must be wise and generous to those less fortunate than ourselves.



## ***2. QUESTIONS FOR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION IN YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME.***

***Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***

*1 Tim 6 vv.6-10*

- What presents have you received that have really moved you and which you never forget. Why were they so special?
- Which would you prefer – to be rich and discontent or to be poor and content? Why do you think that people who are rich are so often discontented?
- What are the ways our culture encourages discontentment? How can you counter them?
- Do you think that giving is easier for some people than it is for others or is it equally challenging for us all to give generously?
- Are some people more naturally generous than others whilst others are cautious by nature? Who is the wiser? Do you find it difficult to find the dividing line between generosity and being wise with resources?

### **3. GIVING TO GOD MUST BE ABOUT WHAT IS RIGHT, NOT WHAT IS LEFT**

**“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

*(Matt 23 v.23 NLT)*

It is all too easy for us to mock the Israelites for being so regimented and self-righteous in their attitudes about what to include as wealth when calculating their tithes. But, on the other hand, it might be healthy to run an audit of our own attitudes as we decide what to keep for ourselves and what we will give to God. Do the ways in which we allocate our resources really please God by obeying the spirit of the first two commandments which Jesus once summed up as:

*“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

*(Mark 12 vv.28f)*

God wants us to love and worship him with *all* that we are and have. But what we actually give to God usually falls far

short of that ideal. All too often it is just a small part of ourselves - we give God the stuff that doesn't require sacrifice or even faith and we do it whilst the going is easy. But God wants even what seems too difficult for us to give; when we are having trouble paying bills or going through other trials, sacrificial giving may seem like asking too much. But the surprise is that giving in faith and beyond the level that seems easy can help us to really depend upon God for our daily bread.

But there is a warning: generous giving should help our spirits to grow and provide sustenance for our souls, but this does not mean that anyone should normally give beyond their means and create situations of personal hardship so serious that we concentrate more on our own situation than upon others. Giving must increase our faith and increase our awareness of God's abundance, love, and grace towards us.

### ***3. QUESTIONS FOR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION IN YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME.***

***Jesus gave himself as the prime example of giving, “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”***

*(2 Cor 8:9).*

- It is an old saying that “charity begins at home”. Do you believe that to be accurate? How does it relate to the Church family?
- When Jesus was asked about his family he pointed to his disciples and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” How would you define your family?
- Should we give only to fellow Christians? Is it OK to give generously to people in need who are practising members of another faith group or who have no faith? *(if it helps looks up Galatians 6 v.10)*

#### **4. WHAT CAN I GIVE HIM, POOR AS I AM?**

**If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;**

**If I were a wise man, I would do my part;**

**Yet what can I give Him?**

**Give Him my heart.**

*Christina Rossetti 1905*

Most adults will have one or more potential sources for giving:

- our regular income, (salary/wages, investment income, pension, etc.)
- our accumulated assets including property, investments and bank balances - and not forgetting whatever we may have received as legacies from family or others,
- our estate which we will leave when we die,
- our time, energy and emotions which we can use in the practical support of fellow Christians and those in need.

When assessing what we can and should give, we need to include all resources available to us; it is not one thing or the other; there is no 'trade-off' between, for instance, the giving of money and the giving of time. All things come from God as a gift to us; when we give time or money, use our talents or invest in emotional involvement with others we are returning what he first gave to us. Nowhere in the Bible does God give

us permission to look at any aspect of our discipleship and to lean back and say, 'I have done enough'.

**The most important part of the equation is prayer and worship which can change our gifts from acts of duty or charity into love gifts for God to use to further his work on earth.**

It is a paradox that prayerfully considering what we will give to the work of God through the church can help us to appreciate the richness of the gifts we have received from God. Our prayers can take us out of ourselves, and refocus our attention away from our own concerns and on God's priorities and on other people. Prayer is a precious defence against the world's message that we deserve to be independent and that our worth can be measured by our wealth.

**So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

(Matthew 6: 31-34)

#### **4. QUESTIONS FOR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION IN YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME.**

*"I the Lord do not change..."*

*"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.*

*"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'"*

*"In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*

*Malachi 3; 6, 8-10*

- What are the ways in which we might rob God?
- We live in an age that thinks it's OK to be "creative" in the ways we minimise our stated income and so minimise our tax demands. Does this same attitude affect the ways in which we decide what to keep for ourselves and what to give to God?
- When thinking about our giving, can you think of views and decisions which God might consider illegal for us to adopt and other views and actions which He might consider immoral or unchristian even though not against the laws of the land?

## **5. CONSIDERED OR CASUAL?**

### **CHURCH OR ANOTHER CHARITY?**

**Now about the collection for the Lord's people... On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income 1 Cor 16; 1f NIV**

**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

2 Cor 9:7

Giving our time and money is one of the hardest parts of the Christian life. It requires every bit of God-given motivation for us to make proper response to what we have received from Jesus: forgiveness, grace, and salvation. When life seems easy then we might feel like giving generously and warmheartedly; when the road is rough we might feel that there are other priorities and we are more reluctant to give. God knows this and it is why the Bible tells us that regular giving requires prayerful thought, planning and commitment.

It is also true that "response" or "impulse" giving to perceived needs at a national level (such as a to relief fund helping victims of a natural disaster), on the street or at a personal family level requires prayer and mature consideration. Is our gift *really* going to help the work of the gospel or are we giving just to make our own consciences feel better in the hope that the problem will go away?



## Why give to the church?

For responsible Christians, giving to the church can be the best way of ensuring that our regular financial gifts are used effectively and responsibly for the work of the gospel.

Money given to the church becomes the responsibility of the PCC to use wisely. Members are elected from among the church family for their maturity in the Christian life and for their honesty. Donors can give in the confidence that the money they give will be spent in accordance with scriptural principles and that where there is a choice as to how the funds should be distributed the decision will only be made after debate and prayer. The PCC's stewardship of resources is the subject of legal scrutiny and constraint, and accounts are published every year.

In some circumstances it might be possible for donors to specify how they want their gift to be used, but in general gifts are given free of conditions.

But remember, each individual donor is accountable to God and to no one else. It is virtually no one else's business how much we give. No matter how gifts are given to the church - by cash or standing order, electronically or by donating valuable items to be sold - the financial details are known only to a very small number of the accounts team - the Vicar or other staff do not know details about what any individual gives.

**“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven** *Matthew 6;1 NIV*

Gifts made to the church are used to support the staff, premises and resources that enable corporate worship, Christian nurture, evangelism and encouragement at home in our local setting and also around the world.

The PCC will only pass on money to other charities or agencies working in aid, relief or evangelism when they know that they can fully trust the staff on the ground and that they are able to hold the staff accountable for the use of funds.

As a guide, you might consider the Church of England guideline that once you have decided how much to give in total you might donate half of that sum through the church and the other half through other registered charities.

Because St Patrick’s is a registered charity it is possible for donors to use Gift Aid which means that, if you are a taxpayer, the church can claim back from the government the basic rate of tax which you paid to the Inland Revenue when you earned the money. This means that every £1.00 you donate gives the PCC £1.25 spending power. *(at the current basic rate of tax at 20%)*

## ***5. QUESTIONS FOR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION IN YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME.***

***Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.***

***Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves***

- 2 Corinthians 9 v.7 says, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” On a scale of 1-10, how much joy do you get from giving to God's work (either at St Pat's or elsewhere)? Are there practical steps which you might take to increase your joy?
- For the Christian, good investment does not necessarily mean putting your funds where they earn the maximum profit but where they do the most good. How can you be sure that you are giving to get the best return?
- Modern marketing and direct advertising means that we all receive many requests from different charities asking for our gifts. Should we try and give a small amount to each of them or give larger gifts to a few and regretfully ignore the rest?
- Upon what criteria will we base our decision?

**written by Martin Hayward**