

Sunday, November 20, 2011

The Sacrifice of Giving (2)

What do we give?

1- **Our hearts**, *“My sons, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.”* (Proverbs 23:26). This is what God wants the most from each one of us, to give Him our hearts, the center of our lives, our longings, our love, and our first priority. Then, we walk in His path, follow him, and fix our eyes on Him without slumber so that we don't deviate from his path.

Notice that **whoever hasn't yet submitted his heart to Christ cannot observe his ways; neither can he walk in His path**. That is to say, whoever gives his heart to the world, to sin, lust, and evil company, though there is a small room remaining for Christ in his heart, will not be drawn to Christ, His glory, His Magnificence, and His sweetness. Thus, he will not follow Him in the path of His commandment in his Holy Church.

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, it is counted to be completely of no value, if we give God without full submission and without first offering Him our love. As the Bible states it plainly *“If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, It would be utterly despised.”* (Song 8:7).

2- After completely submitting our hearts to God through repentance, prayer, and committing to live with Him in His Church, an immeasurable longings for giving to the beloved who purchased us with His blood start to move in the heart. We are indebted to Him with all our lives, therefore we are ready to give everything to Him: **Positions, health, effort, time, Love and affection in prayer, serving the needy, our intellectual capacity, our talents, etc.**

3- **The first Fruit**: it is the first of everything that we have, whether it is wages, yield of a farm or an investment, profit of a project or a company, etc. (Review Deuteronomy 26:20).

4- **Tithing**: ten percent (10%) of any fixed income as a bare minimum for giving such as allowance, salary, inheritance, etc. (Review Levites 27:30 and Malachi 3:10)

5- **Thank-Offering**: These are the things, in addition to the first fruit and tithing, that we voluntarily promise God to offer. For instance, one can promise to give God a Thank-offering in the form of a certain amount of money or perhaps himself altogether (as in Priesthood and ministry for example) or someone may pledge or take the vow of abstinence as it is the case in Monasticism. Nonetheless, it is important to fulfill our vows and pledges as long as we promised them (Review Deuteronomy 23:21-23). It is recommended that you take the council, of your father of confession before taking a vow of a thank-offering and not to be hasty in a pledge that is beyond our spiritual stature or financial resources, or simply unsuitable for us.

How to Grow in Giving?

The answer is a simple equation: *Growing in Love = Growing in Giving*

Therefore, let's charge continuously our hearts with the love of Christ through reading his delightful words, regular prayers, meditating upon His love and His work with us daily in order to grow in His love so our giving would also grow.

Moreover, our giving grows when we practice giving on every occasion, and not miss any opportunity to give, thus we gradually grow in giving.

The Blessings of Giving:

1- True joy in one's heart... Because there *is more Joy to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35)

2- Whatever we offer God we get back 100 folds, in addition to the invaluable eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

3- The gates of heaven opens to us and the bounty of God overflows upon us (Malachi 3:10)

4- Having a personal experience with Christ who accepts our offering and rejoices in it.

5- We build a great stockpile in eternity.

6- Everything becomes sanctified to us (Luke 11:41)

7- Giving severs some of our earthly ties, and elevates us to our heavenly home.



Examples of Giving:

1- **Our fathers the Apostles** who sacrificed everything to follow Christ such as Peter, Barnabas, and Paul (Matthew 19, 27, Acts 4:34-37, Philippians 3:7-8).

2- **Anba Abraam the Bishop of Fayyoun**, one of the contemporary saints who were famous for giving to the poor without any limits. It is said that the bishopric of Fayyoun during his time became a shelter for the poor and the needy where they find food, clothing and basic needs. The stories of giving in the life of Anba Abraam are countless.

3- **Mr. Ibrahim El-Gouhary**: This man lived in the 18th century and had a very high position in the government of Egypt at that time. His hands were generous in giving wherever he went, to monasteries, churches, the poor of every kind. It is said about him that someone begged money from him 18 times in one day, and every time the begger asked him, he would give him trusting that he is giving to Christ and from Christ's hands.

4- **Fr Andrews**, a monk from St. Samuel the confessor's monastery. This old monk was full of grace; he lived the last few years of his life in Alexandria and departed in 1988. He was very ascetic in positions in an indescribable way and never tied up to any position no matter what it was.

One of the things that used to happen to him on daily basis is that whenever someone asks him playfully complements him about something he has in his hands, he would always answer in total innocence and honesty: *“Brother, please take it.”* Often times this would happen when someone complements him about a nice leather crucifix, the monks typically wear, saying: *“This crucifix is very nice Abouna”* he would immediately take it off and gives to his guest in astonishing simplicity saying: *“Brother, please take it.”* These encounters used to happen dozens of times!

5- **Mr. Farid**, was a contemporary Christian who loved to give in secret. He took pleasure in helping poor merchants by buying their merchandises at a price higher than the asking price, not less! As if he is saying *“The hidden charity is in buying and selling.”* His children had almost daily stories about him helping poor merchants in that manner despite the objections of his family.

DEAR BELOVED ONES, may our hearts now long for giving and to make it a way of life, *“For with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”* (Hebrews 13:16).

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL