

ABOUT GOOD DEEDS OF FAITH AND DONATIONS

The modern world of Russian Orthodoxy, for some reasons, is almost entirely devoid of certain clear algorithms for making personal decisions. We have no desire here to list, comment on, or discuss these reasons, but we will discuss one of the lost algorithms. We will talk about the practice of performing good deeds of faith and making donations in the context of the [SPIRICON](#) project.

Faith without deeds is dead, as stated by the holy Apostle James, the brother of the Lord (James 2:14,17, 20, 24, 26). These words are known to the majority of believers.

One area where the same majority of believers often get confused is in the question of where exactly to apply their efforts or direct their donations. In this matter, as you would agree, certainty is important. Certainty is crucial because engaging in empty actions, even if they appear pious, amounts to fruitless endeavors that do not bring salvation. Donations given where they are unnecessary or used in an opaque or questionable manner inevitably give rise to vague doubts, which later sprout as obvious weedy condemnations. And these are certainly not salvation things.

What should those people do who, due to their birth, upbringing, life experience, or sufficient familiarity with their faith, have a clear intention to perform acts of faith but lack certainty regarding how, where, and in what form to do so? Perhaps it's worth at least roughly familiarizing oneself with what is truly a doctrinal truth on this matter and what are misconceptions and emotional impulses, including those induced by dishonest manipulation.

Once again, we want to highlight that we are exclusively referring to matters related to actions or donations motivated by religious reasons and no other causes. Naturally, all motivating factors beyond religious doctrine should be explained by themselves and do not require our evaluation. They unquestionably have the right to exist unless prohibited by the current local legislation of a particular country.

So, many people think this way, and some even preach that salvation — that is, religious usefulness through deeds or donations in the name of the Lord — is found in the deeds or donations themselves. According to this principle, once you've done

your part (made a donation), it's no longer your problem but the responsibility of those who manage the efforts or donations. Supposedly, the Lord accepts the mere fact of it. Yes and no.

Yes, this may be true for those whose souls have become so hardened that they don't even understand the benefit of acts of faith or making sacrifices/donations. For such truly unfortunate individuals, breaking through their own hardness of their souls, finding spiritual alignment with their own Salvation, is already a great achievement. However, breaking through their own hardness is just the beginning of a soul-enriching journey. It's like a person standing at the church threshold. You can't stay on the doorstep forever. Someday, you must gather the courage to step inside.

No - for those who have already entered the Church, whose soul has acquired religious empathic properties, and whose mind has learned to control the impulses of the soul through biblical examples. For such people, another, if you will, rule applies, which consists of the necessity of a rational choice, from the point of view of Christian doctrine, not only of the means and methods applied to Salvation but also of the points of their application. To put it simply, it is necessary to know exactly what to do and for whom, what to sacrifice, how much to sacrifice, and to whom to sacrifice. And also - what not to do and where it is better to refrain from sacrificing. This is the reverse side of the issue.

Let's turn to the indisputable source - the Holy Scripture, about which we know, thanks to Saint Apostle Paul, that: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17)¹.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?"

¹ "All quotes from the Holy Scriptures are given according to the [KJV](#)."

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (Mat.25:34-40)

“But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Gal.6:4-10)

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you.” (Phil.4:10-21)

So, for clarity, let's specify. The efforts of labor in the glory of God and donations, first and foremost, deserve the believers who, not by their own will, let's emphasize

again - not by their own will², find themselves in sorrowful circumstances: captured, sick, homeless, hungry, enduring the killing cold or heat, in other life-threatening situations³, and therefore are challenged in their faith. Those who are in immediate proximity and whose need leaves any doubt. Instant assistance by any available means should be provided to such people. Blessed and righteous are those who render it!

Next, if there is no one in immediate proximity who is suffering from fear of accidental death⁴, one should care for those who have given birth to those who toiling or sacrificing in Christ or have guided them with the Word of the Lord, making their faith alive and fruitful. They plant the vine of Christ - His verbal flock. It's very simple: if there is no one to speak about faith, to teach faith, then there will be no Church. There will be no those who know what it truly is - the Church. And the Church is not a cult, not a ritual, not a tradition, and not much else. The Church is a community of beings who faithfully, if you will - orthodoxly, live their lives in exact accordance with the Word of the Lord. They do not "go to" the Church. They live in it. Those who teach are the second legitimate targets of volunteering help and donations for the Glory of the Savior. We speak of this, like the wondrous Apostle Paul, not because we are in need, but so that the paths of the faithful may be salvific and their hearts may be in the peace of Christ.

Furthermore, if the unthinkable happens and there are neither first nor second ones around, as mentioned above, it's time to think about enemies. Strangely enough, enemies are, to some extent, are neighbors. They come third in line because some of the enemies, astonished by the help and mercy received from faithful followers in the Name of the Savior, will want to learn the truth about our God and thus be saved. But if the mercy in the name of Christ does not make our enemies ponder, it will become a burning coal on their heads.

² Those who willingly embrace their own sorrows and beg for alms are hypocrites for various reasons. Voluntarily assuming one's own sorrows is a spiritual feat that should not be hindered by unnecessary temptations, which is exactly what the righteous person sought to avoid. That's what my gerondas taught me.

³ Let's clarify - it is specifically the fellow believers who are in immediate proximity - close in human or geographical interaction - that Scripture refers to as "neighbors." They are not blood relatives, not friends of different faiths, acquaintances, or neighbors. It's important to deeply understand this because this concept is heavily distorted in today's Orthodox society. One of the most vivid examples from Scripture is found in Matthew 12:46-50.

⁴ We highlight - by fear of accidental death, by a life-threatening need that jeopardizes a person's existence - from illness, hunger, cold or heat, thirst, captivity, suffering in confinement. This does not apply to the rest.

"So if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:20-21)

It is almost unbelievable for a person not to have one of the situations mentioned above. But if the Lord brings someone situationally, on the road of life, to someone in need, a distant person dying, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, then even to the distant one, in that moment, one must become a neighbor, for that is what the Lord Jesus teaches us. Perhaps you cannot summon the distant one to come closer, but the Name of the Lord will be glorified in the distant ones through your mercy towards one of them. Alas, too many today teach to begin their acts of mercy and make their sacrifices with the distant ones, while neglecting and confusing their own neighbors as well as others.

Of course, one must not forget about the church - the place for gatherings in the Eucharist, where the Bloodless Sacrifice is offered and the faithful partake of the Holy Gifts of Christ. It should be simple, without unnecessary adornments and fake decorations, and it should not be forgotten in the distribution of labor and sacrifices. Simple, because even in genuine pomp and complexity, the temptation to do good better and better, endlessly, hides itself—not for the Glory of the Lord, which is in hearts and souls, but for the worldly and passionate, which Christ denied.

Some who disagree with us will say - nothing is too much for Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints... Yes. Indeed. But then, we must start with those for whom the Savior came into the world, did not spare Himself, endured terrible torments and a horrifying death, descended into Hell, and rose from the dead. For whom the weapon pierced the soul of the Most Holy Theotokos. For whom the holy martyrs of God preached with their lives and deaths.

Here is approximately how we think and teach about charity and sacrifice, and about labor for the Glory of God. And that's why we believe that your volunteer work within the SPIRICON project - as preachers, experts in knowledge and world religions, specialists in various fields, information assistants - is more salvific and pleasing to God than any other pastime, because this project has no other activity except teaching people about Orthodox, Apostolic Christianity. That's why we believe that your donations to the [SPIRICON](#) project are more appropriate, salvific,

and pleasing to God than contributions to the embellishment of what is already beautiful and the maintenance of what is not poor anyway. Because your donations are in no way, in no part, and in no case used for anything other than teaching people about Orthodox, Apostolic Christianity. We do not build or repair anything that will burn in the fire of the Second Coming. Our construction is only in souls, only in Eternity. We do not pay anyone, support anyone, decorate anything, or cover any expenses except those directly contributing to the expansion and deepening of the preaching of the Word of the Lord. This primarily includes payment to providers of modern communication services, data plans, access to necessary electronic services, expenses for necessary equipment, access to libraries, and so on. All financial reports on the use of donations will be available annually to any of the donors who wish to receive them (annual dates will be announced later after the organization of the non-profit organization and obtaining the corresponding federal status).

If we have been able to teach you something useful for your salvation in Eternal Life, please remember us in your prayers, good deeds, and small donations. Peace be onto you!

*In Christ,
Abbot Arseny Manko,
Passaic, NJ
2023/6*