

GIVING CHEERFULLY 2 Cor. 9:6-11 Luke 6: 31-36

Today's gospel and epistle center on the importance of giving. The epistle to the Corinthians deals with the collection of the churches of the Gentiles in Greece for the Christians at Jerusalem and St Paul is checking that his boast about the Corinthian church having been ready to make its contribution for over a year is in fact true. He does not want 'egg on his face' if this is not the case; so he reminds the church of the motives for giving and some guiding principles. He makes it clear that giving must be voluntary and not as an extortion. Each must give "as he has made up his mind", cheerfully, "not under compulsion". Sow bountifully and reap bountifully; sparingly and you will reap sparingly. God is able to provide with every blessing in abundance and he enriches in many ways those who are generous.

In the gospel reading from St Luke's sermon on the plain or in the flat place giving is again the theme but here the emphasis is not on our friends but on our enemies as beneficiaries. Just as God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked we must not limit our kindness and mercy to our friends but direct it at those who are against us.

In these days of chat rooms, Facebook and Instagram it is remarkable how much hatred appears on the internet in the form of hate mail. The companies are now being pressed by the government to remove from their sites anything that is of an extremely offensive nature. It really 'beggars belief' how hateful people can be with their messages, (usually sent anonymously of course), threatening all kinds of actions against a politician or someone in the public eye. Last week we witnessed the first anniversary of the brutal murder of Jo Cox, a labour MP, in a public place. A man walks up to her and violently stabs her to death despite her long serving contribution to political life both in the EU and especially to the needs of her constituents. In Brussels a square was named after her last week. The words of Christ spring to mind immediately, "they hated me without a cause". And who could have known more intensely and personally the power of hatred towards one who had striven all his life to bring healing, enlightenment and salvation to the people of the world. Yet Christ bids us, or rather commands us, to love those who hate us and not to judge or condemn but rather to forgive. This order appears in the verse which immediately follows today's gospel reading. And then there is another reason to love our enemies if we, in our human weakness, cannot find the strength and the will to do this. There is an illuminating saying in the life of Mahatma Ghandi that "when you point a finger in blame at someone else, there are three fingers pointing back at yourself". Attacking others, comparing, criticising and condemning ultimately has the greatest effect on us not those at whom we direct our minds. It somehow constricts our freedom, our peace by controlling our emotions and directing us not those at whom we direct our minds. It somehow constricts our freedom and our peace by controlling our emotions and directing them, not towards being dispassionate but by

making us victims of our passions, anger, jealousy, envy, hatred and the like. So Christ's commandment to forgive is based very much on concern for us as people and lifting us above the well laid trap of what psychologists call the 'addictive personality'. Not to forgive is a form of self-abuse. No doubt you have been following this week the trial of the nominee of the US President for judge of the Supreme Court. There was an interesting interview on BBC after the proceedings at the court with a woman in her late forties who had been forcibly raped at a college party in a similar way after too much alcohol. The experience had had a traumatic effect on her which impacted severely on her over 30 years. Suddenly, she decided that she could stand it no more and would write to the perpetrator and tell him what had happened to her and how she felt. She got his address from the college alumni records and wrote to him about what he had done to her. Two days later she got a call from the rapist who honestly confessed that he had no idea what had happened at the party and that he was really sorry. He could not express his profound regret and remorse for what had happened and the pain which he had caused her. His grief was palpable from his words and his overwhelming sense of sorrow at what had happened. After profuse and lengthy apologies, the lady tried to examine her feelings and realising that he was telling the truth she was lost for words. Then after a while she felt a terrible weight lift from her and a freedom to act, to make choices, to enjoy life as she had never done since the incident. She had forgiven him.

Christ speaks of this gift of forgiveness as a reciprocation for the wrongs we have committed and for which we receive forgiveness. It is at the heart of the prayer which he left us to say regularly. Thirty years is a long time for a person to carry such a weight but it is a desire to live which is the key to releasing ourselves from such a terrible burden and to healing, Forgiveness of others and giving to others is the mechanism which the Lord offers to use to love others and ourselves and the world which in his grace he has made for us to enjoy. To withhold forgiveness is to miss all these good things.

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