

Pro Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Brussels

2p.m Service

Last Sunday after Trinity (24th October 2010)

Stewardship Sunday

Texts: 1 Chronicles 29:10-16; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21

In our Gospel passage, Jesus does not instruct people to begin to give, pray, or fast. He knows that believers will do these things. What he speaks about here is the proper motivation behind religious practices. For us today, we are to consider our Christian practice of giving and how we do it.

In St Matthew gospel chapter 6: 1-4, 19-21, Jesus calls us to show a high standard of Christian maturity and behaviour in our giving. This is first an invitation to reconsider the motives behind our act of giving. As Christians, why do we give? And what is it that motivates our giving? Is it because of the pastor's impressive sermons? Is it to gain human praise? These are the wrong reasons. No wonder, Christ invites us to give in secret! This is because, in giving, what we need is the praise of God, which will endure far beyond human and earthly glory.

For this, in verses 19-21, Jesus leaves us with this important question: where does our heart lie? Which is our treasure where our heart is deposited? Could it be our job, business, or banks accounts, maybe with Fortis Bank, ING Bank, or KBC Bank? It might be preferable just for today to substitute the word 'treasure' for 'bank'... not a laughing matter! If there happens to be any news of these banks getting liquidated or distressed, such that there is no hope of my money or yours being recovered, what would our reaction? Those who have their hearts not in Euros, but in God will survive it no matter the difficulty or economic situation! The psalmist says: even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid of any evil because you (God is) are with me!

What makes a gift acceptable or not acceptable before God is not the quantity, measure (say 10%) or the frequency of our giving, but the intention! Our acts of giving are valued in the sight of God based on the genuineness and purity of our intentions. Someone once said to me, "...we give because we want to receive more from God". Do we simply give because we want to get more from God? That is a false motive. This alone may make our giving very unacceptable! It is like saying "I believe in Jesus Christ because I do not want to go to hell". This is equally a wrong motive of belief! So if we give because we want to receive more from God as some of our Afro-American prosperity preachers preach, then we are taking God for granted. It would be better to consider opening a fixed deposit account or better still learning a lucrative skill or business where we would earn more money. In giving, we are not to take God as a financial guarantor or bank that gives interest rates based on the amount of deposit that we make.

Let us consider what King David says: I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. (It is not a commercial or business intent).

Our giving should be grounded in scriptural convictions about wealth: “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it”. (Ps 24:1). Whether we gain wealth via skill or hard labour, we are but stewards of God’s resources and abundance. For this reason, we are accountable to God, the giver. King David’s proclamation of the obvious fact that God is the ‘giver’ is what makes 1 Chronicles 29:10-20 very beautiful and at the same time very challenging! As Anglicans, we also proclaim part of this text in the Eucharistic liturgy during the offertory:

Minister: Yours, Lord is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty, for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.

Response: All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.

The following few points will help us understand why we ought to give:

1. We give because God first gave us (John 3:16)
2. We follow the example of David as he said and prayed in 1 Chronicles 29? “All things come from you, and of your own do we give You, God!”
3. We give to God to show that we love him
4. We give as a sign/token of our appreciation or thanks to the many blessings we have received and even for the trials and problems we are able to face each day of our life
5. We give because we are privileged to be recipients and stewards of God’s resources, and as a result, ought not to hoard or seize God’s resources only for selfish and personal purposes.

At Holy Trinity Church, we are engaged in various ministries in our service of God’s kingdom and the world. The financial strength of the church to exercise these ministries depends to a large extent on our proper understanding of the purpose for which we give. As stewards of God’s abundant resources, we are to enable the ministry of the church by our generous giving just as king David and the people of God generously and willingly supplied all that were needed for the building of God’s temple. The financial demand for the day to day running and maintenance of our beloved church community is our corporate responsibility. Our stewardship Sunday today is therefore another opportunity for us all to reassess our strength in giving, to give account of our stewardship of God’s gratuitous resources and blessings that we enjoy.

And because giving itself is a manifestation of grace received, let us therefore sincerely pray to God to help grow in the grace of giving. Amen!

Augustine Nwaekwe