

On Tithing

From an article by Fr. John Reeves
in the periodical, "The Tree of Life"

Part of our conversion to Christ as Lord involves what we do with our pocketbooks. The Great Commandment is to love the Lord our God will all of one's self. Yet, Christ was emphatic that where our treasure is, there would be our hearts as well. *There is a definite relation-ship between one's material possessions and the heart*, which is the center of man's being.

All too often, the very concept of Christ as Lord is missing in the average person's life. If Christ is Lord, He is in charge: He owns us, to be blunt. He gives us freedom to work in His vineyard, this earth which He created; but we are His. And because of this fact, He demands our confession of this relationship in very tangible terms.

For Adam and Eve, this sign of God's Lordship was the setting apart of one Tree, of which they were not to taste. It was the abiding, tangible confession of the relationship between God and Man. The Tree of Knowledge was to be untouched in obedience to God, Who had given everything.

When Man disobeyed God, it was symbolized by the eating of that forbidden fruit. Sin was Man's taking unto himself that which God had ordered set apart.

Somehow the righteous Abel perceived the need to offer to God once more what his parents had failed to do, a sign that indeed, God's providence provided him with his daily bread. Cain, on the other hand, missed the point. Whether his offering was second-rate, or whether he was trying to propitiate God, Cain did not offer a pleasing sacrifice. When he saw that he was rejected by God, he slew his brother.

The types of Cain and Abel are with us yet. *God requires a righteous offering* - not because He needs it, but because man needs to give it. I was told not long ago, that one can give without loving, but *one cannot love without giving*. *This* mirrors what happened with Cain and Abel. Both gave, but only one loved. Both gave, but *only one offering was acceptable*.

A giving God gave Man Paradise. A giving God created Man in his own image, which implies that Man is to be a giving Man. Since Man had nothing of his own to give, God even provided the gift. And man failed to give even that.

Yet, by being a giving God, the Lord did not stop giving gifts to the sons of men. Through the Law and the Prophets, the gift of the Messiah was promised. As in Eden, the tangible confession of faith was required; this time, not a tree, but a tithe. It was required of Abraham, with whom the covenant

was made, of all his possessions. It was required of the Hebrews under the Law of all the increase from the Promised Land. God kept giving; Man kept getting. And Man kept forgetting whose he was and where the gifts came from.

The person who refuses to tithe - even today - is a person whose pocketbook is not baptized, whose purse is not redeemed. And if the purse is not redeemed, neither is the heart of the one who carries it. *We cannot love without giving*.

We still want to be like Cain, to offer what we want, when we want to do so, and for the reasons we ourselves choose. We want to offer - if offer is in fact the *correct* word - just as pagans have offered their chickens down through the centuries; not as a sign of a relationship with God, but as a means to placate or to control the gods. Sometimes, this is found in the attitude, I will give, but there are strings attached. I will give, but I want my name in bronze. I will give, but... This is giving without loving. And this is what all too many of us do.

Yet, the tithe was never abrogated by Christ. He took it for granted. The Pharisees themselves tithed on everything, but without loving. Omitting mercy and justice, the weightier matters of the Law, was their offense.

St. John Chrysostom preached that tithing was more of a requirement for Christians than for Jews, because the tithe itself was offered in expectation of the Messiah. The Messiah had come, and so the tithe was to be as - guess what?- the confession that *He had come*.

God is a giving God.

When He gave us Paradise, we chose Death. When He gave us the Law as a schoolmaster, we chose to play hooky. When He gave us the Prophets, we chose to stone them. When He gave us a New Tree on Golgotha, this time He called us to partake of it. God is a giving God, One we can love freely. And if we do, we will want to give - not merely tithes, but offerings above tithes; not merely 10%, but 100%. This is what tithing is all about anyway. God does not need a dime, but the image of a giving God, encrusted by our many sins, begins glowing in us as we give, as long as we give in love.

To tithe, or not to tithe really is the question, as profoundly as "to love, or not to love," or "to be, or not to be." It is a question because God wants our tithes, our love, our very being, freely given. However, it is not an option, if we would love Him. We cannot choose to love Him and keep our treasure -that is, God's treasure -somewhere else.

It is a question of hearts and treasures, of those who love and give. It is a question, which the Lord has already answered. And it is the question which all of us must answer as well: to tithe, or not to tithe.