

The GOOD STEWARD

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For the Members of St. Jude Catholic Church

No. 3

DO WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO THE POOR?

by Fr. Tim Church

We are close to accomplishing our goal for the Annual Bishop's Appeal. We will likely need to hear about it occasionally throughout the year to be sure that the pledges do indeed meet our goal, and that the amounts pledged are actually given. Our parish is somewhat transient so it is possible that moves will change pledges and others will need to make them up.

There are many opportunities in our parish to give of our money to those who are in need. The list is very long with second collections, the normal support of our parish, the Building Fund and emergencies. We pray there are no significant natural disasters, but we know that if there are, our parish will listen for the call of our Bishops to respond. I very rarely hear any complaints in the parish about all the opportunities to give. It is possible that people who object are silent but do not give. Silent complaints are difficult to deal with. Some who do not give are justified in that their own circumstances need attention. It is, however, possible that we do not feel any inspiration to give. I admit that I enjoy giving after hearing a moving story of someone's need. To know that I can make a real difference by hearing a story and then responding by giving is, indeed, a motivator.

But is there an obligation to give? The tradition of giving alms during Lent is common throughout the history of the Church. Its purpose has been only secondarily a direct means of correcting or improving the situation of the poor. It is more a means of developing our spiritual life. Almsgiving helps us to know that God is sovereign and that we are dependent on him. It is very difficult for those who live comfortable lives in the midst of the poverty and economic unrest in our world. If we are intent on remaining silent in the midst of the social ills, we must do so with a certain amount of willful blindness.

Our Jewish ancestors prepared the ground for Christian customs of giving. The "alms chest" was a collection point in every local synagogue. The "alms dish" or basin was passed through the synagogue at regular intervals.

It was a custom so common that references (some negative) were made throughout the New Testament. The Pharisees for all their faults were very generous regarding the "alms dish". The instructions that might have moved them from the Old Testament still motivate us today:

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed;
 (Isaiah 58:6-8)

Here truly is the obligation that we have. The tradition of our faith helps us to respond to the call to confess our sins during the season of Lent. We are urged to study the Scriptures and to learn about the lives of the saints. With the kind of communication we have available today we can sit at the feet of the Pope and our Bishops throughout the season of Lent. But if we neglect opportunities to give to the poor, we have missed the point of the season. Consider the Bishop's Annual Appeal as a way to accomplish this obligation. It is not merely a bureaucratic funding source. It is real support in desperate circumstances.

He sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."
 (Mark 12:41-44)

Tim Church

Date	
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RECORD OF
CONTRIBUTIONS

MONTH	1 ST WEEK	2 ND WEEK	3 RD WEEK	4 TH WEEK	5 TH WEEK	TOTAL

DESCRIPTION	ANALYSIS OF CONTRIBUTIONS					

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