

Dear Friends in Christ, as we approach the final days of our Lenten season, my thoughts turn to the theme of almsgiving. You would think that it would be easy for me to speak about this subject, given that I spent all my professional life in the world of finance. Yet, the truth is I'd prefer not to speak about it. In fact, many pastors would also pass on the subject if they were given the choice. Nevertheless, let me share with you some thoughts about almsgiving that comes from a well-written article by Joanne McPortland (9 Jan 2017) titled, "What your pastor won't tell you about parish giving" [Note: those who want to read the full article can find it on Aleteia.org].

Ms. McPortland writes: "...You might catch yourself grumbling, 'Money! Money! Money! That's all Father ever talks about!'...Your average diocesan priest hates talking about money even more than you hate hearing about it....But here's something that hasn't changed in generations....The average share of our income that we [U.S.] Catholics give to our Church is a mere 1% -the same as it's been as long as anyone's been counting....Nobody wants to talk about the basic operating costs of a parish, but if they aren't met there is no place for the community to worship, no support for the many ministries and outreach efforts that make a parish so much more than a building. Father hates having to nickel-and-dime the congregation from the pulpit.

....Too often, though, pastors get such blowback from parishioners about pushing the "treasure" element of stewardship that parishes settle for commitments of time and talent by the same small group of people who always volunteered them anyway. And because time and talent do not substitute for treasure, poor Father is back to nickel-and-dimeing. It makes parish giving, which should be a grateful response to God's gifts and a regular part of Catholic discipleship, feel like being hounded to pay an overdue cable bill. That's not pleasant for anyone! So the hard truth is that our parishes are getting by on too little from too few.

Give consciously. Planning ahead will keep you from resorting to digging in your pockets for spare change as the collection basket comes by. Using weekly offering envelopes or participating in an online giving program, if your parish offers one, are two good ways to make your giving conscious. **Give off the top.** When determining how much to give our parish, many of us look to what's left over after other obligations have been met. We give out of scarcity and fear, rather than gratitude. Whatever we have we owe to God's generosity. **Give more than you think you can.** The tithe, or one-tenth of one's wealth or income, is often mentioned in the Bible, and many Christians today aim for a 10% level of annual giving divided among church and charities. **(Parish giving, though tax-deductible, is not charity for Catholics. It's a precept, a joyful obligation).** In your prayerful consideration, strike a balance between 1% and 100% -pledge to give what you really can and maybe a little more, and to give it gladly and regularly. Don't compare yourself to others; your giving is a covenant between you and your family and God, and God is never outdone in generosity. **Give yourself.** Consider ways to be more involved in the life of your parish this year. See your gifts at work in the various ministries. Explore new ways to use your time and talents in the service of others, not as a substitute for financial support, but as a way of living what that support symbolizes. **It would take very little, in practice, to move that 1% of annual income level of giving to 2%.** For most people, that's the weekly equivalent of a couple of large lattes or a gallon or two of gas. What could your parish do with twice as much financial support every week? And it wouldn't take much to make it 2 out of 3, or even 3 out of 3, who give regularly. **You can make that difference, starting now. And then maybe you and Father can both stop dreading this time of year."**

Pax Christi, Fr. Thomas