

The Nativity and Almsgiving, Part Two

By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

This simple reflection on Christmas leads us to the Christian concept of giving. The first attitude required of Christians is to be open to the gift of God, because when they accept the divine gift and appreciate its importance and role in their life, they become worthy to practice giving in turn. “By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

The Bible urges us to give and places great importance on giving. In the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 26), giving tithes was an expression of man’s gratitude to God for the gifts He has given us. In the New Testament, this concept extends beyond tithes to giving everything. The Lord says, “Give to anyone who asks of you” (Matthew 5:42), meaning that Christ asks His disciples to keep their hearts and hands open. Ears unwilling to hear are a sign of hardness of heart, unbecoming of a disciple of Christ.

Christian giving does not have a certain limit; it is open to perfection. Humans give according to their ability. But this ability is determined by their love for the Lord, and their appreciation for what He has done and is doing for them. It is also determined by the degree of their freedom from the love of possession, and their awareness of the importance of almsgiving to the extent where almsgiving will become their joy.

Many people give in order to fulfill the divine commandment, while others give to gain God’s blessings and to please God. Both types of giving are acceptable, but incomplete. Giving is linked to the spiritual level that the giver has reached. There are those who have reached the point of imitating Christ literally by giving everything, even offering their entire lives. The love of almsgiving grows in us exponentially as we grow in the love of God.

Some refrain from giving for many reasons. These people have not experienced the joy of giving and its effect on them. People often think that giving gladdens the hearts of those who receive it. This is undoubtedly true, but does it not gladden the heart of the giver more? The Bible says: “A generous soul will be enriched, and he who waters will himself be watered” (Prov. 11:25). It has been said: “The Lord loves

a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). The joy of the gift’s recipient is a double joy for the givers, because God blesses them.

Giving does not stop at material things. It is a state that believers experience constantly, until it becomes permanent. Do not deprive yourself of giving, and do not make any excuses, lest you remain closed to yourself. Your sincere smile may provide refreshment for a sad soul. Your look of tenderness and compassion may revive a suffering person who lacks love and care. The warm touch of your hand may restore the spirit of someone feeling neglected and lonely.

No one is exempt from the virtue of giving. Let us remember the widow's mite. The lesson lies in your willingness to give before the quality and quantity of gifts. Imitate your incarnate Lord for your sake and for your salvation. Respond to His amazing giving by imitating it as much as you are able, and you will see how many blessings you will reap for yourself. Giving frees you from selfishness, isolation, self-love and fear, which can kill. Christ did not come to keep you captive; He came to liberate you and give you the fullness of life. Throw yourself before Him and pile the dust of your selfishness at the feet of the Divine Child. Open your hands to be filled with His gifts, so that you can happily pass them on to your brethren, and the celebration of the feast will truly begin.